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Why Turkey is wary of Kurdish rebel trap

Turks broadly support a strike into Iraq, but that could play into the hands of the PKK.

Scott Peterson

Istanbul, Turkey – As Turkey sends military convoys to its southeast border with Iraq, diplomatic efforts are intensifying to head off a cross-border incursion aimed at crushing the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

On Oct. 23, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan traveled to Baghdad and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was in London to increase pressure on US and Iraqi forces in northern Iraq to halt a surge of attacks that peaked Sunday with the most lethal guerrilla strike in a decade. Twelve soldiers were killed and eight went missing.

There's broad public support and parliamentary approval for a cross-border attack, but analysts say that a Turkish decision to invade would ensnare it in a PKK strategy aimed at provoking just such an invasion. A Turkish offensive would bring NATO-ally Turkey face-to-face with US and Iraqi Kurdish forces, as well as the PKK. It could also destabilize northern Iraq – the one area of Iraq relatively calm since the 2003 US invasion – and embroil its troops in a quagmire.

"The PKK wants Turkey to engage in full-scale, extensive warfare – not just with the PKK in northern Iraq, but with the Iraqi Kurdish [forces] and to draw in the US and other foreign powers," says Fadi Hakura, a Turkey expert at the Chatham House think tank in London.

One purpose, says Mr. Hakura, would be to "reenergize their popular base" which has "been on a rapid decline" in southeast Turkey, where ethnic Kurds are broadly sympathetic to PKK aims, but often oppose violent methods.

That PKK strategy is "based on the assumption that the Turkish government is trigger-happy, nationalistic, and willing to take a knee-jerk reaction," says Mr. Hakura. "But the Erdogan government is far more calculating...and has indicated a clear preference for diplomacy over military action."

Despite the build up of some 60,000 Turkish troops – and repeated assurances from Ankara that Turkey will limit its attacks to PKK targets – so far generals are pushing diplomacy, aware that 24 cross-border operations in past decades have failed to destroy the militants.

Already the crisis has grabbed the attention of Washington, which Turkey accuses of not doing enough to thwart the PKK. President George Bush on Monday contacted Turkish and Iraqi leaders, asking Turkey for restraint, and Iraq for action against the PKK, which the US, European Union, and Turkey all label a terrorist group.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd and leader of one of the two main Kurdish parties in northern Iraq, said Monday that the PKK would declare a cease-fire.

The PKK denied declaring a new cease-fire, and said one from June still held. PKK attacks have killed 42 people in the past month, two-thirds of them soldiers. The Turkish military said its counterattack on Sunday against 200 PKK fighters who had come across the border killed 34.

The PKK strategy of drawing Turkey across the border has "failed," because Turkey is not likely to "go into Iraq at this moment," says Seyfi Tashan, director of the Foreign Policy Institute at Bilkent University in Ankara.

Instead, Turkey will step up pressure on the US as well as Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani, who Ankara believes has done most to provide a haven for the PKK. The two Kurdish leaders say their forces are incapable of forcibly removing the PKK, with Mr. Talabani noting a local sympathy: "We will not hand any Kurdish man to Turkey, even a Kurdish cat."

Turkish closure of the border would deeply hurt Iraq's land-locked Kurdish areas, but would also take a large toll on Turkish traders. Turkish parliamentarians voted 507-19 last week to give authority for a cross-border push, with all 19 votes against coming from pro-Kurdish deputies who favor diplomacy instead.

"We have to have a Damocles sword – that has to be kept, not only for the PKK, but also for PKK supporters like Barzani," says Mr. Tashan, recalling that a threat of war against Syria in 1998 forced Damascus to expel PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who was later arrested in Kenya and flown to Turkey. "We will let them see it, that they have to...get rid of the PKK."

The rebels say they will not be dislodged, but suggested Monday that a diplomatic solution was possible. "If the Turkish state stops its attacks, then increased tensions will be replaced with a combat-free environment," said a PKK statement. "Our movement and people have the strength to defend [but] we prefer to solve the problems by democratic and peaceful ways rather than armed struggle."

The pro-Kurdish Firat news agency quoted a senior PKK commander, Bahoz Erdal, saying that the group held the eight Turkish soldiers as "hostages in the hands of our forces."

Turkish artillery and planes have already been striking northern Iraq, and on Sunday aircraft hit 63 targets in hot pursuit after the raid, according to the military. The purpose of a cross-border operation would be to deny the PKK sanctuary. "We may conduct a joint operation with the US against the PKK in northern Iraq," Erdogan told a Turkish newspaper.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that despite previous resistance to the idea, US air or cruise missile strikes are now being considered. "Now the Turks are at the end of their rope, and our risk calculus is changing," the *Tribune* quoted a US official familiar with Bush's call to Turkish President Abdullah Gul on Monday.

But such a response is not likely to sit well Iraqi Kurds, even though Barzani's peshmerga militia struck a deal with Turkey in the late 1990s to take on the PKK. A further irony, experts say, is how the PKK's tactics have changed as a result of the insurgency in Iraq.

"They have learned, they have adopted very closely the lessons from the Iraqi Sunni insurgents," says Hakura at Chatham House.

In the past the PKK staged large attacks with between 200 and 500 fighters against police stations and military installations.

Now "they are using hit-and-run tactics, small cells, mines, ambushes, C-4 explosives, and improvised explosive devices," or IEDs," says Hakura. "Almost half the Turkish military victims this year were killed by mines, rather than in combat."

A closer look at the PKK

What is the PKK?

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was founded in 1974 as a Marxist-Leninist organization calling for a separate Kurdish state. Under the leadership of its founder, Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK sought an independent Kurdish homeland for the region's 30 million Kurds, of whom 14 million live in Turkey. The ethnic Kurdish region includes eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran, and parts of Syria and Armenia.

What tactics does the PKK use?

The PKK employs guerrilla tactics, usually relying on bombs, suicide bombers, or small, contained attacks. Their attacks are often directed at the Turkish military and police, but the PKK has frequently targeted civilians. Fighting has been in decline since Mr. Ocalan was captured in 1999 and sentenced to death. His sentence was eventually reduced to life imprisonment in October 2002 after Turkey abolished the death penalty. The commutation was followed by a cease-fire, as well as the withdrawal of rebel fighters from Turkey. Ocalan has since

See **PKK** *on page 7*

News

Church leaders fear another war in south of Sudan

Fredrick Nzwili

Nairobi (ENI) – Sudanese church leaders seeking a peaceful settlement of tensions between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the country's governing National Congress Party, fear another war could erupt in the south of Africa's biggest country.

"We hope they will find a peaceful solution to the problem. Another war is hard to imagine. The region is tired of war. The people don't want war," the Rev. Anthony Bagoye, the general secretary of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Regional Conference told Ecumenical News International in Nairobi on 24 October.

On October 11, the SPLM/A withdrew from Sudan's Government of National Unity amidst allegations that the NCP had violated a 2005 peace agreement signed in Nairobi, Kenya, which ended 21 years of war in the south. At the time, it was Africa's longest conflict.

"We have witnessed delaying tactics from the north [government], but we strongly feel the Comprehensive Peace Agreement should be implemented," said Bagoye.

Keys ingredients in the SPLMA/A allegations are the failure to implement a protocol under the peace agreement in the oil rich Abyei region, a lack of transparency in oil sector operations, a failure to withdraw the Sudanese armed forces from the south, and a delay in north-south border demarcation.

"The international community helped in brokering the CPA [peace agreement]; we urge them to come and see what is happening," said Bagoye.

But a priest from the Comboni Roman Catholic order who runs projects in South Sudan told *The East African*, a regional weekly newspaper, that the real problem is the presence in both parties of people who believe their own interests will be served by a continuation of war.

"We knew all along, especially in the last four months, that the CPA was collapsing. Both parties have been readying for military actions," said the Rev. Kizito Sesana. He said that he believed that the government of south Sudan was trying to get Darfur rebels to ally with the SPLM/A against Khartoum, the newspaper reported.

The SPLM/A leader, Salva Kiir, says his movement is committed to the peace accord after years of fighting for freedom and equality. He insists there will be no return to war, something some church leaders, who played a key role in brokering peace in 2005, are beginning to doubt.

In China, new crackdown on dissidents

Scores of arrests are to ensure a protest-free Party Congress, say rights groups.

Peter Ford

Beijing – As China's ruling Communist Party holds its most important conclave in five years, the government has launched an unusually harsh crackdown on potential troublemakers, say Chinese and international human rights groups.

Scores, perhaps hundreds, of petitioners, democracy activists, religious figures, and human rights workers have been abducted, imprisoned, or confined to their homes over the past six weeks, according to rights monitors.

"This definitely seems to be the worst in years," says Phelim Kine, a Hong Kong-based researcher with Human Rights Watch. "It is much, much more comprehensive and wide-ranging" than earlier sweeps.

So, as delegates to the ruling Communist Party listened to their leaders' speeches and discussed the state of the nation at their 17th Congress in October, at least one voice will not be heard: Yu Tongan, a peasant farmer in southern China. He would never have got into the most important meeting on the Chinese political calendar. But in the time-honored tradition of petitioners, he had hoped to buttonhole one of the delegates to seek redress for his son, who suffered brain damage after a government-mandated vaccination. Instead, he is trapped in his village by two plainclothes policemen standing guard outside his front. "I just wanted to find someone who would talk to ordinary people," Mr. Yu explained by telephone from his home. "But the police told me I am not allowed to leave or I will be arrested."

Move keeps Party meet protest free

The goal of keeping Yu, and others like him, away from the capital "is to sterilize Beijing of potential public protests that would embarrass the party" during the Congress, says Mr. Kine. "It seems to reflect a desire by some elements in the Chinese government to put a very calm facade over public events."

At the Congress, party members selected a new 190-member Central Committee that in turn appoints the Politburo, and sets the course for the next five years.

Earlier this year, a Chinese human rights group published what it said was the text of an internal speech by Yu Hongyuan, deputy head of the Beijing Public Security Bureau, advocating "harshly penalizing one person in order to ... frighten many more into submission."

That is what Li Heping, a dapper young lawyer who has made a name for himself defending dissidents, says he believes happened to him on Sept. 29. After leaving his office in the company of one of the policemen who has been shadowing him for months, he says, he was forced into a car by four men in civilian clothes, who covered his head with a piece of cloth and drove him to an unknown destination.

In what appeared to be a basement, he says he was beaten unconscious by men armed with tire irons and electric cattle prods. He was then released in the middle of the night in woods outside Beijing with a warning to leave the capital and give up his law practice.

"The government says it wants a harmonious society, but what happened to me was a slap in the face for the rule of law," Mr. Li says. "The trouble is that when people demand that the government respect their rights, and the government cannot do that, then they are seen as enemies."

Other such "enemies" caught up in the current crackdown include one of Li's clients, Gao Zhisheng, another lawyer who recently wrote an open letter to the US Senate in favor of greater freedoms in China and who has not been seen or heard from since Sept. 22 when police raided his home.

A well known election activist, Yao Lifa, has been missing from his home in Hubei Province since last Sunday, according to his son. Family members told reporters that Ye Guozhu, who has protested the eviction of tenants to make way for Olympics projects, has been held, along with his brother and son.

Anonymous victims include scores of petitioners whose shelters have been destroyed in recent weeks and who have been taken into custody. Reuters news agency last month revealed the existence of a secret detention center in Beijing run by officials from the town of Nanyang in Henan Province where more than a dozen petitioners were being held in a two-story cell block.

A "dry run" for the Olympics?

"We really have no idea how many" people have been detained in recent weeks, says Kine, "because so many of them are marginalized and do not appear on the radar" of human rights organizations.

Human Rights Watch is worried, Kine adds, that "this might be a dry run for the Olympics," when the government will also be concerned to keep potential troublemakers out of public view. "They have the template," he says. "Given the relative success they have had in sweeping people off the streets this time, there is no reason why they won't do it again ahead of the Olympics."

Peter Ford is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Hailing Poland election turnout, church says its views played part

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw (ENI) – Polish church leaders have welcomed a record turnout in national elections that saw the defeat of the governing centre-right party of Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski and his identical twin, President Lech Kaczynski.

"I hope we'll see a creative continuation of the Poland which emerged in 1989, and was significantly shaped by Pope John Paul II," the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Warsaw, Kazimierz Nycz, told Poland's Catholic information agency, KAI. "There is now a new generation which thinks differently about the state and its future."

The archbishop was reacting to the victory of the opposition Civic Platform (PO) over the governing Law and Justice Party (PIS) in the October 21 ballot, for which there was a 53 percent turnout, the highest in 18 years.

Another archbishop warned, however, that the triumphant PO could have trouble surviving in government for more than two years. "All post-communist countries face the same problem of low civic awareness; democracy is maturing only slowly," Archbishop Slawoj Glodz of Warsaw-Praga said in an interview with Poland's *Dziennik* daily newspaper. "The future belongs to centrist groups, who are still seeking a clear identity of ideas without radicalism. The time has passed for adoring the breath of Lenin."

The PO took 41 percent of the votes to the PIS's 32 percent on a platform that included tax cuts and rapid privatisation. The PO is expected to seek a coalition with the smaller Polish Peasants' Formation. Two parties previously in government, the left-wing Self-Defence and Catholic-nationalist Polish Families League, each failed to gain the 5 percent of votes needed to enter parliament.

Poland's Catholic Bishops' Conference had urged citizens to vote for candidates upholding "the Christian vision of the person and society" in a pastoral letter read nationwide on October 14. The bishops said "non-negotiable values" should include support for heterosexual marriage and opposition to abortion. Speaking on October 22, the bishops' conference secretary-general, Bishop Stanislaw Budzik, said the appeal had played a part in the election.

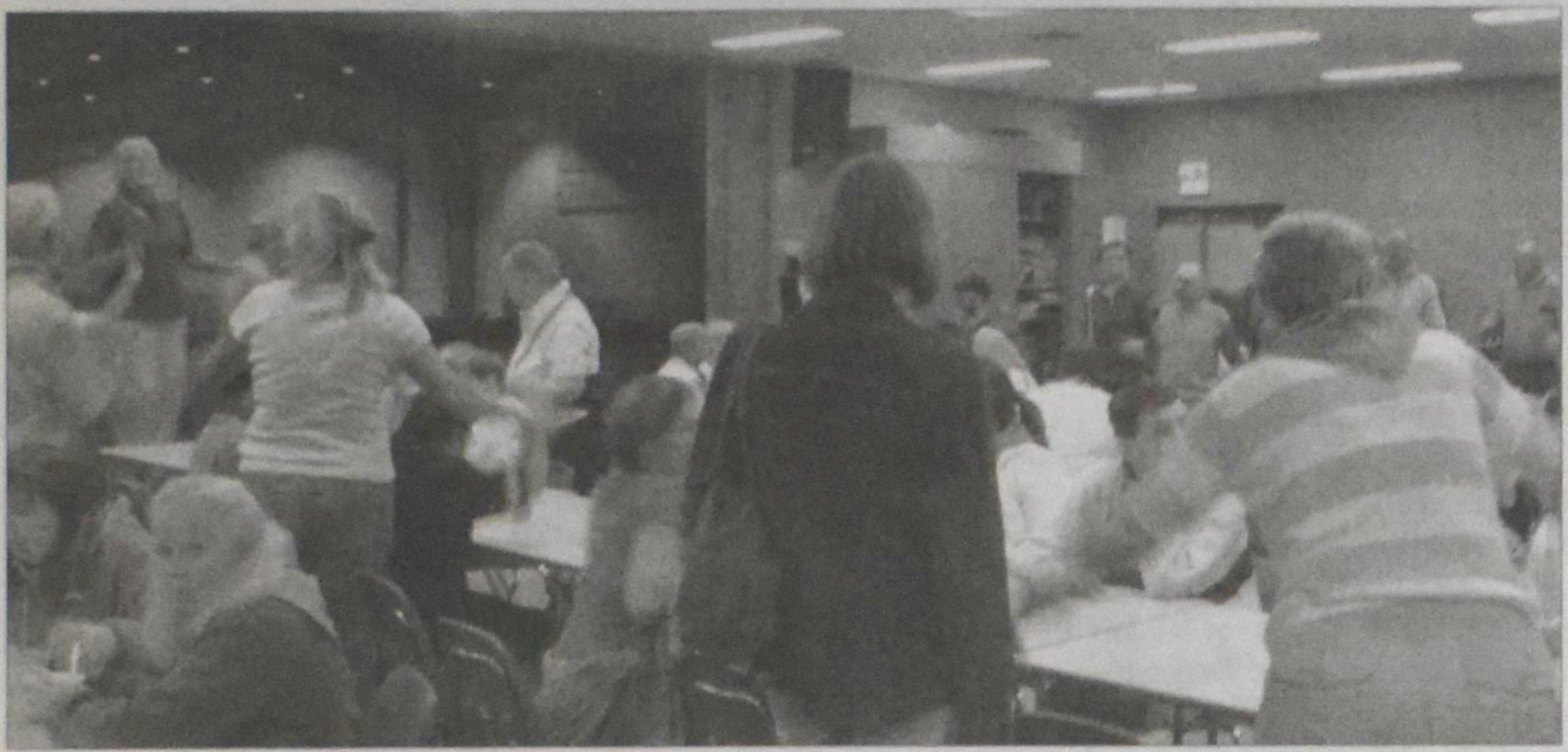
Archbishop Tadeusz Goclowski of Gdansk said Poland had experienced a "huge waste of time" under the PIS-led government.

Election commentators said PO leader Donald Tusk had gained most support from city dwellers and younger voters, as well as from Polish migrants abroad.

Among minority church reactions, the head of Poland's 570,000-member Autocephellous Orthodox Church, Archbishop Sawa, told KAI that he hoped a new government would grant equal recognition of Orthodox holidays such as Christmas and Easter. He hoped it would settle the status of 23 disputed churches, currently the subject of an Orthodox appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

See related story on p. 24

Not them and us – together we are friends of Jesus



Our friend, Neil

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When I asked Neil, one of the friends, to tell me why he loves Friendship Club, he wrote, *"The things that neil likes about friendship is to help out put out chairs and tables and to sing songs about Jesus and have a good time."*

Neil has become a special part of my husband, Rinke's, and my life. He attends Covenant CRC every Sunday afternoon and sits beside us as we worship. He always has prayer requests when the congregation is asked to share prayer concerns. Often, he asks the minister to pray that Jesus will come back soon.

Neil likes to write encouraging notes to people he cares about. I have one hanging on my fridge that says, "We are so happy that we are going two heaven to be with Jesus forever we can't wait."

After the service when we drive Neil to another worship service that he regularly attends, he reads from the Bible, sings songs, and prays with us.

Neil is a special friend who has ministered to us and shown us Christ's love.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

I love Tuesday nights. Why? Because I can go to Friendship Club at my church, Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines.

Before I started volunteering at Friendship Club, I thought it was a ministry to people with physical and mental challenges. Weekly encounters with friends that include greeting each other, singing, prayer, a Bible story and drama, crafts, and a snack have shown me that it is much more than that. It is a gathering of believers where Jesus is praised. Also, it is a ministry of physically and mentally challenged people to so called able-bodied people. In other words, there aren't them and us. Together we are friends of Jesus. We minister to each other.

I asked Elly Hoff, leader of our Friendship Club for 22 years, to share some of her insights and experiences. Here's what she had to say.

****

Did you work with developmentally challenged people in other settings before you took on this role?

I have taught students with learning disabilities. I found it very exciting and challenging. As a teacher in this setting, I have always felt that a personal relationship with the students is essential. They also need to be assured that I am their advocate, that I care, and that I expect them to do their very best.

****

How has Friendship evolved and changed through the years?

I believe that Friendship has evolved in an experiential way. As a community, Covenant CRC has accepted our program and its participants with open arms. Many folks, old and young, have been involved. We are all the church together. Our worship experiences – Friendship Sundays held twice a year – have broken barriers in relationships and in worship.

****

How do you maintain the energy and the vision to carry on with the work?

This program stimulates my creativity. The enthusiasm with which the participants attend keeps me going. The forgiveness so freely given for mistakes made and forgetfulness makes me able to live with my weaknesses.

****

Have there been people along the way who have been mentors to you in your role as leader of Friendship Club?

Throughout the years, my mentors have been parents of the friends and group home workers who care for the friends. They have shown devotion, faithfulness, and a desire for the best for their child or client. When I have gone for supper to a group home and seen how the workers have made it a home, I am humbled. I have gone to homes where the parents are so devoted to their children and work hard to give them a meaningful life. These are my mentors.

****

How have the friends assimilated the truth of the gospel into their lives?

One friend, Paula, has gone home and shared the Bible stories with her mom. Her mom wrote me a note about how meaningful it was for her and how happy she was that Paula took these stories to heart.

****

How has the program influenced the caregivers who accompany the friends each week?

I have seen through the years how the caregivers have become more and more involved in the weekly program. They sing along, encourage their clients to participate, and enthusiastically come to our church services. When I see them in different places besides Friendship Club, they are very enthusiastic about the program.

****

How has your involvement in Friendship influenced your relationship to God and your faith life?

The simplicity of faith that so sincerely comes through the friends is compelling. It draws me in, frees me up, and challenges me to go beyond my comfort zone with pleasure. When I look into the eyes of my friends, I see the eyes of God. They draw me in and make me feel like I am their family. Their smiles are genuine, their hugs are comforting, and their enthusiasm is exciting. On Tuesday nights, I know there is a God. On Tuesday nights, I also know that I need a Savior. And the Spirit is definitely moving through us all on Tuesday nights.

Sherri's song

Sherri, one of the friends, wrote this song, "Lead Me Home," which she sang at a club gathering, as well as at a Friendship worship service.

Oh, my God, lead me home.
Lead me straight to you.
Oh, my God, lead me home.
Lead me straight to you.

Oh, my God, lead me there.
Guide me through the light.
Take me there through the path.
I will find you there.

Oh, my God, lead me home.
Lead me straight to you.
Oh, my God, lead me home.
Lead me straight to you.

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Editorial

On the ordinary and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit

Harry der Nederlanden

I want once again to call your attention to a publication of Calvin Seminary, the *CTS Forum*, a small magazine that features the writings of Calvin Seminary professors. We used to get it in the mail, but now I have to look for it on the back table in our church. It is always worthwhile. Look for it. The latest issue has a couple of interesting articles that I want to look at – the first is a panel discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in which several profs participate; the second a brief analysis of the synodical report of the Third Wave by Prof. David Holwerda.

The work of the Spirit is, of course, first of all a mystery that we confess, for we know that it is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. Since I'm no theologian, my purpose is not to give answers but to raise some questions, questions about boundaries.

The discussion among the Calvin faculty begins by stressing the broadness of the work of the Holy Spirit. Duane Kelderman opens by saying, "It's the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us that animates everything we do – not just what we do in the church but in our everyday lives." Dale Cooper affirms this statement, saying that "the Holy Spirit is behind everything in creation and everything in recreation."

Panel members begin by emphasizing the application to believers of Christ's atoning work, to our rebirth as well as our new life in Christ, i.e., sanctification. This is the greatest miracle of all: that we who were dead in our trespasses are made alive in Christ and that we are transformed into new creatures.

But this isn't what all the churchly chatter has been about in our times, for this is part of the invisible working of the Spirit. Maybe "invisible" isn't quite the right word here, for we assume that the fruits of regeneration and sanctification are not invisible. They mold our entire lives. But these are things that happen inwardly for the most part, like the working of yeast, and they happen to each and every believer. It is what makes him a Christian. So it does not distinguish him from others in any remarkable way. Sure, a Christian can stand out in terms, say, of his biblical and theological knowledge or in terms of his hospitality, but these are as much the outcome of his own efforts to live the Christian life as they are gifts of the Spirit.

The charismatic gifts that have been the focus of the church's attention in recent times have been the dramatic ones that arrive in a spectacularly direct way and that certainly distinguish the recipient from other believers. They are more things that happen to believers by the miraculous action of God in the Spirit than by the faithful application and discipline of the believer.

At the same time, however, we are told that perhaps we should pursue these gifts – or at least some of them. Some advocates provide drills by means of which we can obtain them.

John Bolt points out that Reformed theology has always spoken of the continual working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in our continual conversion and renewal. If we have lost sight of that, it's because we have forgotten our own tradition.

Kelderman, quoting Eugene Peterson, warns against the use of the word "spirituality" because "it gives this notion of something other-worldly, not part of our normal day-in, day-out lives."And Cooper stresses that we may not look down on our forebears as less Spirit-driven than our own age just because they didn't speak in tongues or get words of knowledge. He doesn't want to look down on their form of piety "just because it isn't flashy".

There's a lot more. The panel reflects on the fact that many leave our churches because they say they do not sense the power of the Spirit working in our worship and in our congregations. It's all too ho-hum. And the panel looks for ways to rejuvenate worship and service by introducing some of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. Mary Hulst, for example, suggests that asking for testimonies as part of the worship service may also be a way to allow some who have received a "word from the Lord" to share this with the congregation.

Overall, however, the emphasis is on "how extraordinary is the ordinary work, or how ordinary the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in our lives." It's an emphasis that is very Reformed, I think, and one that strikes me as biblical.

Now we move to Holwerda's discussion of the Third Wave report presented at this year's synod and returned to committee for more work. The Third Wave emphasizes hearing the voice of God directly through prayer and prophecy, healing and deliverance (casting out demons) ministries, and spiritual warfare that involves truth and power encounters with the demonic realm. None of this has ever been part of the emphasis of Reformed churches – or of other traditional Protestant churches for that matter.

Holwerda looks back at the 1973 report on Neo-pentecostalism. Its most basic contribution, he contends, "was its rejection of cessationism, that is the belief that the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased with the death of the apostles and the close of the scriptural canon." That report concluded that the Spirit is free to continue to give the church extraordinary gifts even in the present.

Holwerda focuses on the gift of prophecy. The majority report affirmed this gift and the minority report warned against it. Someone who receives the gift of prophecy receives it directly from the Lord as a special insight for a specific situation. The majority report distinguishes it from preaching because the latter is the result of study and preparation. Although the 1973 report rejected the idea that spontaneity is what distinguishes a message from God as a gift of prophecy from the Spirit in contrast to the use of the intellect, the majority report does not include preaching in the gift of prophecy "Why should we now restrict the gift of prophecy to the minor phenomenon in Scripture of a sudden prophetic word and exclude the basic and primary Christian understanding of prophecy?" asks Holwerda.

To me this question sums up most of the questions I have about the embrace of Third Wave phenomenon into the life of the church. The procedure, almost of necessity, must begin by contrasting ordinary and extraordinary gifts. The first are acquired by prayer, piety and due diligence. We work at them over a lifetime. The second fall upon us unbidden, as it were. They invade us like an unexpected wind or fire and work surprising, extraordinary things.

The question is unavoidable: why didn't the church experience these phenomenon for hundreds of years? Because believers didn't pray or believe in the Spirit hard enough? Wouldn't the persecuted church at the time of the Reformation have been greatly strengthened by such miraculous gifts? Why does the Spirit only seem to shower certain gifts on certain denominations?

Admittedly, these are unanswerable questions, but they question our ability to somehow categorize these gifts as distinct. After all, at Pentecost the signs did not come because the disciples had implemented methods to acquire them. They came unbidden. And although many have spoken in tongues since then, I'm not aware that any church has been invaded by tongues of fire. We've had to resort to candles.

In one congregation I belonged to as a student, there was a group of pious members who stood up before the church and claimed that they had received a word from God about the direction the young congregation should take. The discussion concerned building, location, structure of worship and so on. Others in the congregation, including myself, had differing ideas. These were the result of prayer and reflection, but we didn't have the certitude to say that our ideas came from God and were confirmed by certain signs. How does one oppose ideas that are God-given? Unless you are willing to claim that your certitude is equally from the Spirit – and why not, since hard thinking and planning are no less works of the Spirit in the congregation? – you are effectively muzzled.

Another example. In Jubilee we have had dialogue sermons in the past in which members share what the text and the sermon said to them. Is this somehow essentially different from getting a word from the Lord and presenting it as such? How does one know?

An even more important example. In the panel discussion, the emphasis was on the working of the Spirit not just within the boundaries of the church but in other spheres of life as well. Why is our discussion of extraordinary gifts limited to the boundaries of the church? Why shouldn't a Christian doctor or therapist get a direct word from the Lord about what ails me? But if he did, wouldn't he be delinquent if he didn't follow the very same procedures as any other professional? Why shouldn't a Christian janitor be able to walk into a classroom and tell the teacher that he has received a word from the Lord and she ought to revise her curriculum accordingly? Does the Holy Spirit suddenly give insights to academics who haven't done the requisite study?

If the Holy Spirit works outside the church, say in our labor unions and political action groups, why shouldn't we welcome miraculous prophetic words there? And if we basically ignore the claim that they are directly from God and therefore true but subject them to the same interrogation and tests as any one else's opinion, what's left of the gift?

The church needs to be suspicious of the mulifarious claims made by all sorts of spiritualities nowadays, so it cannot be wide open and naive in welcoming every claim. But won't those who feel they have received such a direct word feel quashed if it is subjected to such questioning?

Once the distinction has been made between the ordinary and the extraordinary, haven't we created a tension that is bound to generate more conflict than renewal in the church – and perhaps elsewhere.

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Animal rights and the Christian

More than two decades ago, while researching the British Christian pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, I noticed in passing that during World War I a minority of its members were vegetarian while during the next war it was assumed at meals that they were vegetarian. I'm not sure if the archival material contained an explanation for the change or even for the position and since vegetarianism was not the focus of my research (and I wasn't a vegetarian myself) I really did not look for it either. My educated guess would be that the basis for their stance was ethical.

It should, however, not be assumed that all vegetarians base their position on ethics. When recently researching the Seventh Day Adventists, I noticed that the SDA emphasizes vegetarianism for health reasons and that William Kellogg introduced his corn flakes for that reason.

Vegetarianism in the western world is a fairly recent phenomenon, but it can at least be traced back to Benjamin Franklin. Yet listing people like Mahatma Gandhi and American sprinter Carl Lewis as vegetarians is in some respect misleading. Gandhi was a vegetarian for religious-ethical reasons, while Lewis was one for reasons of sport.

Although their positions are significantly different, both could possibly find scriptural support. In paradise the human being was given seed-bearing plants and fruit to eat and it was only after the flood that God gave mankind permission to eat meat. As C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch put it in their commentary on Genesis, "the fact which now prevails universally in nature and the order of the world, the violent and often painful destruction of life, is not a primary law of nature, nor a divine institution founded in creation itself, but entered the world along with death at the fall of man, and became a necessity of nature through the curse of sin." (p.85). The apostle Paul was quite willing to give up meat if that meant winning people for Christ (the implication seems to be that at times he ate meat). The picture Isaiah paints of the new heaven and new earth suggests that we won't be meat eaters.

As Christians we are expected to reflect the newness of God's kingdom as much as possible here on earth. In other words, there are various biblical grounds to be a vegetarian.

Vegetarianism could be regarded as a passive form of showing that animals have rights. A more active form would be objecting and protesting against animal misuse and abuse. The recent Michael Vick case aroused an avalanche of comment against dog fighting. But what about rodeos and chuck wagon racing? While living in such different places as Victoria and Kingston I rarely thought about those events. The closest I probably came was seeing pictures of the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, or reading Hemingway's descriptions of Spanish bull fighting. But living in southern Alberta I'm confronted with yearly rodeos in Brooks. It has prompted me to write some letters to the editors.

In Genesis 1:28 God gave us a mandate, to rule/have dominion over the animals. Unfortunately, that has often meant lording it over animals as if we could do with them what we wanted. Some therefore, most notably Lynn White Jr., have blamed Christianity for much of our environmental problems. While the accusation has some merit, long before Christianity appeared Assyrian kings contributed to the extermination of animals, including Syrian elephants. And William Cronon, in *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 1983, showed that Indians were responsible for many of the environmental changes before the arrival of Europeans and Christianity.

In other words, it is not Christianity per se that is responsible for the lording it over animals, but rather human nature. But this form of dominion does not reflect properly how we should image God. God cares for his creation and so should we. Certainly misuse, never mind abuse, is not in God's character. Rodeos and chuck wagon racing are only for the amusement of people and have no benefit for the animals involved.

If I understand the Genesis account properly, I have to care for animals and am prohibited from misusing and abusing them. And if I see or know about misuse and abuse I should protest against it. Since rodeos are very popular in southern Alberta, I know that my objections are easily shrugged off. Many Christians see nothing wrong in them. As a CRC member recently said, it's part of a way of life. As if that is a justification!

Writing letters to an editor is only a mild form of activism. One step further is joining a protest march or demonstrating in front of an animal research laboratory. Even more extreme is burgling the laboratory, destroying the research, and 'liberating' the animals. In the latter case, protesters take the law into their own hands. There is here a parallel with the anti-abortion movement. Some protest in front of a clinic, others also take the law into their own hand and destroy the clinic or shoot the doctor. The concern in both cases is with rights, in the one case with animals, in the other with unborn babies.

Do we even have human rights? In the Netherlands, some ministers and teachers objected to the human rights movement. Its approach, they argued, was too secular and the Bible rejected absolute rights, allowing, for instance, slavery – even though the apostle Paul undermined its basis – and capital punishment. While their objections were correct, they ignored the needs of the larger society as well as the Bible's statement that in Christ we are a new creation. That means we have new insights and that we should reflect more and more the Kingdom of God. While the Bible provided the basics for the new approach, on the whole the churches have not been in the forefront of the human rights movement. Now we need to ask "*Quo vadis*, churches?" with the animal rights movement.

Many countries have already assigned animals certain rights. As the Michael Vick case made abundantly clear, dog fights are forbidden because they are cruel. There is only one horse slaughterhouse left in the US, the rest is legislated out of existence. Even the one in DeKalb, Ill, may soon be closed, for Illinois legislators have argued that killing horses for human consumption is inhumane. To some extent the SPCA could be regarded as the guardian against animal abuse.

But some want to go further. In this summer's edition of *Queen's Quarterly*, Canada's oldest quarterly and published since 1893 (vol.114:2, pp.187-205), Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka ask if we are ready to acknowledge that the fauna may have rights other than the ones we assign them. Many in the animal rights movement compare themselves with the slavery abolitionists, who in their time were reviled, yet they succeeded. "These modern-day abolitionists," the authors point out, "draw explicit comparisons between human slavery and the breeding, bondage, torture, and exploitation of animals. Animal exploitation underpins the way we feed and clothe ourselves, our forms of entertainment and leisure, and our system of industrial production and scientific research." Every year in North America about 10 billion animals are killed for reasons of food, research, or entertainment.

The modern-day abolitionists take issue with the notion that animals exist to serve human ends and reject the assumption that humans matter more than animals. In the western world human beings have usually placed themselves "above" animals, but the abolitionists, arguing that "the human-animal divide is as much a cultural as a biological construct," want to replace that with a "radical egalitarianism."

The abolitionists don't differentiate between the animals; at least that is the impression the authors leave. If that is true, then the mosquito has as much right as the elephant. If they don't mean to imply that, then the abolitionists are back to an hierarchy in the animal kingdom. Their non-differentiation seems akin to a Buddhist-Hindu view of life. They ask, "why should humanity be the measure of moral dignity or moral standing?" But if not God and if not human beings, who then? They suggest that recent research on animal subjectivity has shown that animals have "other kinds of consciousness" and the authors may imply that this includes moral consciousness.

While I have some serious problems with the authors' and abolitionists' perspective, the article is very challenging and deserves our attention. To what extent does the confession that we are created in God's image impact our attitude to animals? To what extent are we superior?

The contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God*, while indicating that we are earth keepers and caretakers, does not address this new animal rights movement. Should we condemn this radical movement and do as my former instructors did with the human rights movement, or do we as Christians have something positive to contribute? How would it affect animal research if we maintain that "created in God's image" means superiority to animals? While I grew up with the idea of superiority, it now seems to me that it is a wrong term.

If a mother cares for her baby, is she superior? If that would be the case, it could lead to human hierarchy and racism. Rather, the mother has different functions and qualities, but is not superior to the baby. And if we accept a hierarchy, where do we draw the line? What do you think? Are there in *CC-land* readers interested in furthering this opening salvo on this intriguing topic?

Bert den Boggende,
Brooks, AB

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Perspective

Great global shift to service jobs

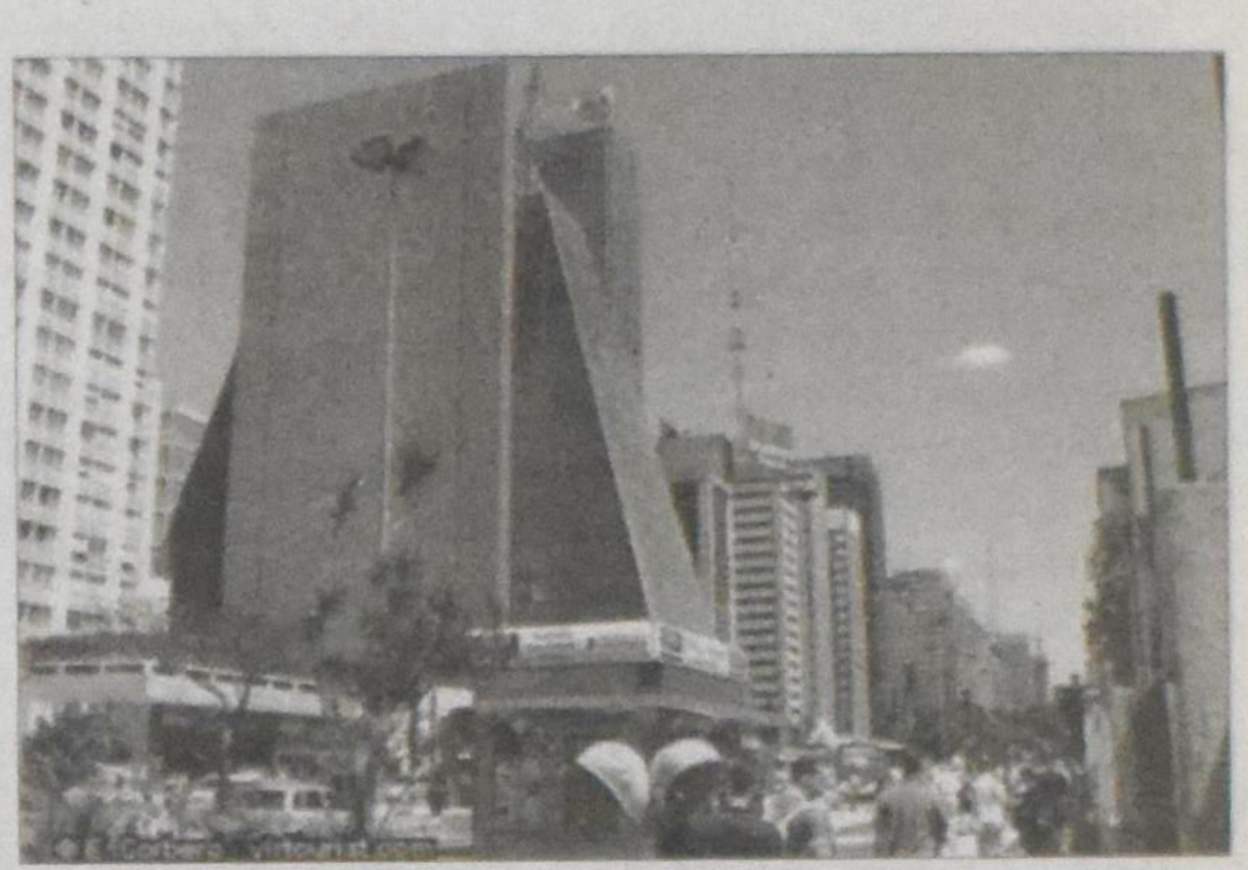
Mark Trumbull and Andrew Downie

Boston; and São Paulo, Brazil – The life story of Brazilian Valdir de Santos, who has gone from farmhand to taxi driver, is in essence the career path of workers around the globe.

For the first time in human history, more people are laboring in service trades than in food production, according to data gathered by the International Labor Organization (ILO), an agency affiliated with the United Nations.

As recently as 1996, agriculture accounted for 42 percent of world employment, with another 21 percent of workers in goods-producing industries and 37 percent in services. By last year, the ILO says in a report released over the weekend, 42 percent were in services, 37 percent in agriculture, and 22 percent in industry.

It's too soon to talk about a white-collar world. Many of these newly urbanized workers aren't employed so much as they are scraping for survival on city streets. Mr. De Santos's own life has become easier, yet he recalls his father's farm as "a civilized life compared to the life the poor live today in big cities."



São Paulo, Brazil

But if this great job shift is wrenching, the transition, if managed properly, can be as positive as it is inexorable, economists say. "The switch ... frees people from geography," says Gregory Clark, an economic historian at the University of California, Davis. "Singapore can be as rich as Canada, even though Singapore has no land."

Technology, in fact, is opening the door to a new phase of economic competition in services – from banking to tourism and healthcare. This could expose advanced economies like the United States to new challenges, even as it presents enticing new opportunities for entrepreneurs. The Internet and air transport now make it as easy to trade many services across borders as it is to trade goods.

This migration away from farm work represents a vital phase in human progress, Mr. Clark says. In many places, it is occurring at a surprisingly slow rate. Once people make that step, they tend to live in larger communities, acquire more skills, and eventually make more money.

The trend doesn't make manufacturing unimportant. But as the world gets wealthier, a rising share of income gets spent on services. And rising factory productivity allows more people to work in services.

Now, service jobs are growing worldwide, benefiting millions. Brazil's experience typifies the broad but uneven impacts. The country is globally competitive in agriculture and aerospace, among other industries. But services are where the growth is. In São Paulo, such jobs are springing up from posh tourism and financial districts to middle-class homes in search of cooks and maids.

"Driving a taxi is much easier than working the fields, I can tell you," Mr. De Santos says in Portuguese as he plies the streets of São Paulo. As a young man, "I worked 12 hours a day and I sweated from 7 in the morning until 7 at night. It was hard work. Here you think a little and it's not hard at all."

Yet all around him he sees jobs characterized by numbing drudgery and low pay. Many people who move to São Paulo simply swap a rural struggle against poverty for an urban one.

The ILO voices similar concerns in its new report on "key indicators of the labor market," released over the US Labor Day weekend.

Many workers remain "underutilized," it says. For all the challenges posed by the transition, the rise of services appears to coincide with positive trends in the economy or social indicators in most regions of the world. China and India have lifted millions of people out of poverty. Banking and tourism sectors are growing fast in many developing nations. The former Soviet bloc is capitalizing in part on expertise built up during the communist era, such as

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

Know one, know none

I will be teaching a World Religions class at Redeemer University College this winter and am warming up to the experience. The planet has always been religiously diverse, but in post-Christian, post 9/11 Canada, with its hyper-consciousness of diversity, it behooves us to learn something about our neighbours from other religious traditions. A little honest curiosity can build friendships that may help prevent us from killing each other – a not uncommon practice in places around the globe.

Curiosity, some might warn, kills the cat. There is a danger in studying other religions – a danger of losing faith in one's own religion. "Comparative religion," it is said, "makes one comparatively religious." While there are always spirits on the loose in any human encounter and one ought to be wary, our investigation into world faiths need not be grounded in such fear. As the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector tells us, even our own prayers can lead us astray. Look at it this way: one way to love our neighbours is to listen to them and be interested in their ways. If all truth is God's truth, we can expect to grow in truth as we listen.

In fact, teachers in World Religions circles have their own proverbs. "Know one, know none," boasts that ***not*** knowing another religion other than your own is a form of ignorance. Put differently, "He does not know England who only England knows." By leaving the familiar country one finally gets perspective as one looks back on one's home identity. "Familiarity leads to the dulling of questions," says one writer. "You may think you understand your religion less than you really do."

The other religion

The fact is, though, most North Americans are already learning about another religion, and have been doing so for a few hundred years. Secular humanism is another religion although it is loath to identify itself as a religion. But it is a faith nonetheless – a faith in human autonomy. So think of the matter this way: preachers are teaching comparative religion each time they contrast the Christian faith with technological therapeutic military consumerism – or some version of it.

So we are already in the game. Still, we can go deeper. Max Weber suggested approaching other cultures with an attitude of *verstehen* – a German word meaning empathetic understanding. This is the practice of walking a kilometer in your neighbour's moccasins before pronouncing your own perspective on their way of life. This means visiting their homes and places of worship, sharing meals, reading their sacred texts, and puzzling over their religious symbols. Reading commentaries is not enough.

I remember going door to door one summer when I was a teenager, promoting a Vacation Bible School program and trying to trigger spiritual discussions. Behind one door was a Hindu woman, and I practically barged into a comparative analysis with her, telling her that her religion had no hope in it.

It was a blistering hot day, and she gave me and my companion some lemonade. Then she gave me some gentle advice I'll never forget: "Its rather arrogant to go around pointing out the faults in other people's religion," she said.

A corner on the truth

In his highly readable book *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come as You Are Culture in Church* (Zondervan, 2005) John Burke says that beneath the question "How can you think your religion is right and other religions are wrong?" is a deeper charge: "Aren't you just pumped full of religious pride?"

There are lots of ways to approach this, but the best one is to say that everyone has the right to believe they have a corner on the truth. This is not suggesting that all views are equally valid – just that everyone has the prerogative to believe they are right. In fact, few people wander around believing what they think is wrong. To say no one has a corner on the truth is a self-defeating statement.

Still, if our tone or attitude is arrogant, that is a sign of immaturity. The imitation of Christ ought to begin with humility, not pride. Learning about other religions can foster deeper compassion and provide better clarity on points of disagreement. Religions have numerous moral laws in common, but they also have some vastly different conceptions of God. Comparing sacred stories and images of God can be a helpful way to share our faith.

Ultimately, what a study of other religions inevitably provokes is a deeper motivation to understand your own faith better. I remember when a muslim student told me that the idea of forgiveness was repulsive to him – that it was unjust and ridiculous – I went back to my Bible and thought a little more deeply about this central tenet of my faith. He might have been a little arrogant, but it prompted me to a deeper, stronger faith. Conversations such as this require an uncomfortable vulnerability and ultimately can lead us to a deeper embrace of our own journey in Christian discipleship. The gospel is best served when our methods match our mandate: love.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

computer programming.

"They had to do it behind the Iron Curtain for military applications," and now they're deploying those skills for economic advantage, says Gary Kleiman of Kleiman International, a Washington consulting firm that tracks emerging economies. The UN's human development index, based on factors such as life expectancy and education, has been rising in most areas, although Sub-Saharan Africa remains a worrisome exception.

Economists generally say there's no reason the world's various regions can't enjoy simultaneous development. One's gain need not be another's loss.

"It's not a zero-sum game at all," as long as pro-growth policies are pursued, says Mark Weisbrot, a development expert at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington.

Straightforward steps can make a big difference, labor experts say. For instance, reducing child labor means that more children can get an education. "You'd be surprised ... how quick one can reap the benefits" of policies that boost labor productivity, says Lawrence Jeff Johnson, author of the new ILO report.

Every country will continue to need a mix of low- and high-skill workers, but global incomes may hinge on skill growth in the service economy. "As these economies strengthen, then we have pillars of strength around the globe," Mr. Johnson says. "This is a positive thing. It shouldn't be viewed as a fearful thing."

But some economists do worry about disruptions. As technology and rising education levels in developing nations turn services into tradable commodities, workers in Boston may find themselves in competition with lower-cost rivals in Brasilia. And workers in Brasilia could find themselves competing with even cheaper labor in Bangladesh.

At a congressional hearing this summer, Princeton University economist Alan Blinder warned that America faces the potential offshoring of millions of service jobs. From hair stylists to trial lawyers, providers of "personal services" will be OK, he predicts, but workers are vulnerable in fields where work doesn't need to be done near the customer.

Even unabashed proponents of globalization's virtues talk about the need to help displaced workers adjust. "Trade ... might even double in the next 20 years or so" as a share of the economy, predicts Jagdish Bhagwati of Columbia University in New York. "It's a fantastically good situation for everybody involved. [But you] have to have institutional support to handle the volatility" of jobs.

For now, most workers in Brazil are simply focused on local realities, not global opportunities. Natalia Torres, a university student in São Paulo, says her friends all see their futures in office work, or service industries, or some similar job that doesn't demand manual labor. She opted to study public relations because she likes dealing with people. She's working as an office assistant while attending classes at night.

"Young people today are lazy," she says in Portuguese. "My grandparents came from Europe and worked hard in the fields. I am certainly lazier than them and even [than] my mother…. The only people who work in the fields today are those that don't have the means to get to the big city."

Media push-pull

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Just a few days ago I was driving into Toronto on a weekday morning. This is usually one of those times when I turn on the radio and start searching for traffic information, but I find myself getting impatient as I wait for the latest update. Having to sift through so much audio garbage is the price I pay for the information I am eager to hear. Finally, the programming turns to the 'guy-in-the-sky' but even then before he announces the latest details on traffic, I'm being advised to buy a particular brand of engine oil because it offers superior protection. Something I was just itching to hear! And even during his fast paced and brief report I was advised to visit a particular garage for the best service for my car! The 'pitchmen' know they've got my attention and they've taken advantage of it to market their wares!

If that's today's radio (I know all stations are not like that), consider what's happened to regular 'commercial' television. Take a stopwatch sometime and time programs like 'Canada AM' on CTV or a similar program on Global or City. You'll be surprised how much time is spent on advertising and how little on programming. Even the program hosts are constrained to restrict any visiting guests to stick within the short segments allotted to them.

Take another Canadian favourite: Hockey Night in Canada; notice how the separation between ads and programming has blurred. Our screens are loaded with little 'extras' in the margins with strategically placed ads and active ad boxes. As well, wherever the camera pans on the action, there are logos strategically placed in the background on the boards that subtly reinforce our familiarity with corporate logos.

Fifty years ago when television was in its infancy, peddlers came to your doors to sell their brushes, vacuum cleaners, dry goods, milk and bread. Through modern media, the 'peddlers' get in even closer by creatively pushing their wares as you sit in the comfort of your living room, family room or bedroom. "Please hurry", they urge, "pick up the phone and dial 1-800…" to place an order for the hot, only-on-television deal! Similarly with the internet; again you are exposed to advertising in the margins and through annoying 'pop-up' ads that actually require you to do something to make them go away.

Unless you are Amish or you are living in isolation in some backwoods somewhere, today's media is pushing and pulling you and impacting your decisions every day.

What does all this mean for the church? The church has the world's most important message: a message that has eternal consequence; a message of grace that everyone needs to hear. In the face of the modern media onslaught today, where is the good news? Is our silence masked by the noise of media, a message squelched by the static of worldly pleasures?

Does our silence show a complacency that makes the church more irrelevant each day? Where are our priorities for the Kingdom of God when it comes to the use of our time, skills and abilities, homes, businesses or farms, our spending and the use of our possessions? It seems that, for the most part, today's churches are only getting the leftovers (after the mortgage, the car payments, the groceries etc.). Even our governments make sure they get the first piece of our income, and put the onus on us to file tax returns to get any overpayment back! In a sense, they are getting our first fruits – not God!

In the face of this media push-pull today – it is of utmost importance that we get our priorities in order. Many of us are not intentional or deliberate enough at putting the Kingdom first when it comes to use of our time, talents, and treasures. It is important that we set 'first fruit' goals for ourselves. We need to be deliberate! To do that means taking charge. It means living and being guided by biblical principles on stewardship and giving.

Changing to a 'Kingdom first' priority requires us to plan and to manage all our resources (not just what we give) with God's Kingdom in mind – whether it is through our family, church, or other kingdom ministry.

To do so, effectively, try and follow this checklist:

1. Acknowledge God first – he enables you. You need God's help and blessing.
2. Listen to God's prompting of your heart – his Spirit working within you – listen for it by following a prayerful process that requires listening and not just talking.
3. Decide/Step out in faith – make a commitment to God.
4. Discipline/Activate your decision – make it more than a good intention.
5. Celebrate and give thanks – God wants to be your God. You are part of his community – a community that celebrates and revels in God's goodness.

For God's sake confront the clanging sounds and charming pictures that entice us to buy and commit our time and assets. Change to a simpler approach to life by putting the needs of the Kingdom First!

Stewardly tip: Cook once – serve several times. This tip from a reader: when Alice cooks rice she cooks a large pan full – many times more than she needs to serve for the meal she is preparing. The work to cook a large pan or a small pan of rice is much the same, the only extra work is the bagging and freezing of the extra portions. But the next time when she needs cooked rice the time and energy saving becomes evident as it doesn't take much to defrost and re-heat a portion. It is one way that Alice conserves energy – time and power. The added benefit is that she can quickly prepare a meal for unexpected but welcome guests!

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Balanced giving

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

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Church

Church bank improves lives of Tanzanian poor

Fredrick Nzwili

Nairobi (ENI) – On the southern slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro, a small bank owned by 330,000 members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Northern District is improving the lives of poor Christians, while still managing to make a profit.

"When we started, the projections were that we would make profits after three or five years," said Fahanaeli Andrew Kihunrwa, general manager of the Uchumi Commercial Bank Ltd in the town of Moshi. "But in one year and three months we started making profits. So people have been wondering how we did it."

Kihunrwa explains, "The simplest answer they find is that this is church-based. God is with them."

Members of the Lutheran church agreed to form the UCB in 2003 as a financial institution that would offer people financial services at low rates of interest, while directing savings to ethical investments. The people, due to their poverty, could not access loans from or open savings' accounts with mainstream commercial banks.

"On Sundays, the basket would go around with messages such as, 'Yes! Form your bank', 'Contribute to your bank'," Kihunrwa says. Because of the positive response from congregations, the church-based bank opened its doors to the public in 2005.

The Christians in this area of Tanzania are mainly Lutherans, who are peasant farmers. They grow coffee, bananas and cereals, while also keeping livestock. Due to unpredictable weather patterns and declining global coffee prices, however, the farmers found them-selves becoming ever poorer. More than 50 per cent of them live on less than one US dollar a day, and some believe the main cause of their poverty is a lack of knowledge and an inability to access capital.

"So, we agreed, that in addition to providing commercial banking services, the bank would also have serious concerns about the levels of poverty among the members of the diocese," explains Kihunrwa.

In earlier years, people in this area of Tanzania had lost savings in co-operative societies that had been formed on the basis of many promises but which then collapsed.

"The people did not want to hear anything about cooperatives. But when they heard we were assembling, through the parishes, an institution that would help in financial services, they said as long as it is under the church, then they could re-form," Kihunrwa explains.

Confidence is shown by the fact that, currently, 64 Lutheran parishes out of 151 have created savings and credit societies. Put together, the people's savings make a substantial total, and the bank can then make loans. It also channels some government development money to members of the diocese.

Arthur Shoo, a member of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania and now director of programs for the Nairobi-based All Africa Conference of Churches, explains that local people are now getting loans where once they would have had no chance of receiving credit from established commercial banks.

"Lives are changing," says Shoo. "With loans, the people are buying better dairy animals, which they keep for milk. They are also refurbishing their houses. They are also able to send their children to school since they can access loans for education."

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is a member of Geneva-based ECLOF. ECLOF used to be known as the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund, founded in 1946 by leaders of what would become the Word Council of Churches and bankers who sought to harness credit in the service of the most needy.

Reformed church groupings agree to create new global body

Stephen Brown

Port of Spain (ENI) – The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has agreed to unite with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to create a new "global entity" that will group 80 million Reformed Christians.

"This is a truly, truly important moment," said WARC president the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick after the alliance's executive committee, meeting in Trinidad, voted unanimously on October 22 to unite with the REC, whose executive committee had agreed to the pro-posal in March.

The Geneva-based WARC has 75 million members in 214 churches in 107 countries, while the Grand Rapids, Michigan-headquartered REC has 12 million members belonging to 39 churches in 25 countries. Of the REC's member churches, 27 also belong to WARC.

"We will be a stronger community which serves a wider part of the Reformed family," WARC general secretary the Rev. Setri Nyomi told Ecumenical News International.

The members of the two groupings trace their roots back to the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox and others, as well as to earlier church reform movements such as the Waldensians in the Piedmont valleys of Italy, and the followers of Jan Hus in the Czech lands.

The REC's president, Dutch pastor Rev. Douwe Visser, hoped the decision to unite would lead to Reformed churches around the world having a "stronger voice".

WARC said that all member churches of the two existing groups at the time of union should become members of the new body, with the exception of churches under suspension in either organization. South Africa's Nederduitsch Hervomde Kerk van Afrika (a minority denomination of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa) is a member of the REC but was suspended from WARC in 1982 because of the church's support for apartheid.

The recommendation to create the new body to succeed WARC and REC came out of a meeting in 2006 of leaders from the two groups.

WARC traces its roots to an alliance of Reformed churches founded in 1875, and to the International Congregational Council, which held its first meeting in 1891.

The REC was founded in 1946 as a grouping of Reformed churches that did not belong to WARC. But from the 1960s onwards some churches became members of both bodies. REC represented 12 million Reformed Christians in 39 churches in 25 countries. Of its 39 member churches, 27 were also members of WARC.

A proposed basis for the union reads:

"The basis of the (name) shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, found in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and witnessed to in the church. This (name) embodies Reformed identity articulated in historic Reformed confessions and continued in the life and witness of the Reformed community."

The new Reformed body will be open to all members of WARC and REC who are not under suspension, as well as other Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, First Reformation, United and Uniting traditions who affirm the basis of the new entity.

The new Reformed body will also invite movements, agencies and theological institutions of the Reformed movement into active affiliation with it.

The key callings of the new Reformed body will be:

- to foster Reformed confessional identity and communion among Reformed churches, and unity in the whole church;
- to promote justice in the economy and the earth, and all of God's creation, and to work for peace and reconciliation in the world;
- to encourage the renewal of Reformed worship and spiritual life as a global family of God's people;
- to strengthen leadership development and the nurture of the covenant community;
- to promote the full participation of women and youth in all aspects of the church's life;
- to renew a passion among Reformed Christians for God's mission, both witness and service, in a spirit of partnership and unity;
- to interpret Reformed theology for contemporary witness and for the unity of the church.

While the new Reformed body had been tentatively called the World Reformed Communion, WARC's Executive Committee is still exploring options and will try to come up with an alternative name during this meeting.

British church leaders urge re-examination of abortion law

Martin Revis

London (ENI) – To mark the 40th anniversary on October 27 of Britain's 1967 Abortion Act that legalised abortion in specified circumstances, church leaders are calling for a re-examination of the situation.

The department of health in Britain reported that in 2006 there were nearly 200,000 abortions in England and Wales, which represented a four percent increase from the preceding year.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, wrote in Britain's *The Observer* newspaper that the spirit of the act was being lost, with the procedure tending to be treated as normal rather than as a last resort in cases of extreme danger or distress.

Referring to recent discussion on whether women might take abortion-inducing drugs at home, Williams commented, "The pregnant woman who smokes or drinks heavily is widely regarded as guilty of infringing the rights of her unborn child. Yet, at the same time, with no apparently sense of incongruity, there is discussion of the possibility of the liberty of the pregnant woman herself to perform the actions that will terminate pregnancy."

The archbishop suggested that the present 24-week limit should be reviewed in the light of recent advances in scientific knowledge.

Instead of calling for an end to abortion – the usual Roman Catholic position – the leaders of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and Scotland, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and Cardinal Keith O'Brien, in an open letter called for a change of heart on the issue. They urged better counseling to be provided for young women who find themselves pregnant, and more practical help for those who choose to have babies.

"Whilst upholding the principle of the sacredness of human life, it is both licit and important for those in public life who oppose abortion on principle to work and vote for achievable incremental improvements to what is an unjust law," the cardinals wrote.

In a radio interview, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor acknowledged that there could only be hope for incremental progress at present. If a gradual decrease in the amount of abortions could be achieved, it would be a step in the right direction, he said.

The Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed churches have marked the abortion law anniversary by publishing a joint briefing paper (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk) that provides background information for churchgoers to debate the issue. The three churches have also set up a joint working group to examine abortion, human embryology and early human life, including therapeutic cloning and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis.

A committee of British members of parliament is currently investigating whether, in the light of medical advances in dealing with premature births, the time limit for abortions should be reduced from the current 24 weeks. A recent opinion poll showed that only 20 per cent of the British pubic supported a general ban on abortion.

Growing rich-poor gap is new 'slavery', say Protestant leaders

Stephen Brown

Port of Spain (ENI) – Leaders of the world's biggest grouping of Reformed churches have com-pared the effects of economic globalisation to the transatlantic slave trade, and said that Christians need to combat this modern form of "enslavement".

"As a matter of the integrity of our faith, we must say, 'No' to slavery in all of its forms," said the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick. He was speaking at an meeting in Trinidad of Reformed leaders from around the world.

"While we acknowledge this year the 200th anniversary of the passing of the transatlantic slave trade act by the British Parliament, we are painfully aware that slavery is still with us," said Kirkpatrick in his presidential report to WARC's main governing body, its executive committee. The 39-member WARC execu-tive committee held its second meeting since 2004, when the alliance's highest governing body, its general council, last met in the Ghanaian capital, Accra.

Kirkpatrick explained how his own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA) had been campaigning for the rights of migrant farm workers in the US, and underlined the need to fight human trafficking in all its forms. "But as we affirmed in Accra, an even more pernicious form of human enslavement is being wrought on millions through the process of neoliberal globalisation that is driving a dramatic and growing wedge between the rich and the poor," the WARC president stated.

Kirkpatrick was referring to a statement known as the Accra Confession adopted at the 2004 assembly. In Reformed theology, "confession" designates a state-ment of faith. "We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalisation," the Accra Confession asserts.

Delegates at the 2004 meeting adopted this confession after they visited the cells at the Ghanaian port of Elmina, from where millions of slaves were transported during the transatlantic slave trade. "We all left Elmina with a firm conviction that 'never again' should Reformed Christians turn a blind eye to the enslavement and destruction of people," said Kirkpatrick.

WARC general secretary Setri Nyomi, Bishop Brian Farrel, WARC president Clifton Kirkpatrick with Pope Benedict XVI.

His statements were echoed in another report to the WARC executive committee by the Rev. Setri Nyomi, the Reformed alliance's general secretary. "Two hundred years after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, our oneness should have a strong tone of resolving to leave no stone unturned until all forms of slavery and enslavement are overturned," said Nyomi, a Presbyterian theologian from Ghana.

Nyomi explained that the Accra Confession meant that churches and Christians needed to question whether their lifestyle and actions contributed to or hindered overcoming poverty. He acknowledged, however, that some WARC members, "most of them churches in the global North," had questioned whether attitudes to the global economy should be treated as a "confession". These WARC members had said statements of faith should be restricted to doctrinal matters.

"The response is very simple," Nyomi told ENI, "The Reformed family recognizes the sovereignty of God.... We do not separate whether God is sovereign in the mundane and in the spiritual realm. Therefore our stance on social issues is consistent with the doctrinal claim of sovereignty."

Web link: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth (the "Accra Confession"): warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/doc_159_1.pdf

Religious freedom in India 'shrinking' says Christian author

Anto Akkara

Bangalore, India (ENI) – Despite India remaining the world's most populous and vibrant democracy, freedom of religion is steadily on the decline, says John Dayal, a journalist-turned-Christian activist, who is now secretary general of the All India Christian Council.

"Many of the rights have been systematically diluted over the years by governments, courts and fundamentalist forces," Dayal told Ecumenical News International in an interview about his soon-to-be-released book on religious freedom in India. *A Matter of Equity: Freedom of Faith in Secular India* is a critique of religious freedom in the country. Dayal says that this freedom, or lack of it, ranges from the steady dilution of constitutional guarantees to harsh treatment meted out to Christians and minorities in every corner of the country.

The book is a collection of articles Dayal wrote when he was a journalist, and before he became outspoken on issues concerning India's Christian community. In his writings, Dayal describes a steady upsurge in anti-Christian violence from the late 1990s, when the Hindu nationalist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) emerged as a strong political force.

"Even before the BJP came up, religious freedom had been facing curbs both by the government and the judiciary," says Dayal, who lists several documents in his book to support his claim. He points out that the first anti-conversion bill, which restricts people converting to Christianity was introduced by the avowedly secular Congress party in the 1960s. The BJP, Dayal asserts, now emulates this legislation.

He adds that Christians enjoyed "better religious freedom three decades ago than now," and notes that often lower courts in several areas have been "hostile to Christian grievances where they get little relief".

While India stopped allowing missionaries to enter the country decades ago, Dayal notes that, "Christian missionaries who have done exemplary service to the nation have been unceremoniously packed off by the government denying them visa extensions on one pretext or other."

Apart from that, the author says that the State machinery has been used to harass Christians and their institutions, even by secular governments. "In this context, one will wonder what is the meaning of the religious freedom spelt out under fundamental freedom in our constitution," Dayal adds.

"But, what we (Christians) have faced from 1990s has capped it all," argues Dayal, who has visited almost every troubled spot in the country following attacks on Christians.

A Matter of Equity cites systematic and orchestrated attacks on Christian targets by Hindu fundamentalist forces that the author laments as being rooted in a "belief in violence". Dayal says that during recent times India has recorded hundreds of incidents of deliberate violence against Christians, including the murders of priests, rapes of nuns, and brutal assaults on missionaries, besides attacks on Christian gatherings and buildings.

On the other hand, following the steady rise in atrocities, Dayal says, churches have also begun to speak up and come out on to the streets.

However, Dayal says that church leaders have failed to provide strong leadership for the 26 million Christians in India, or "to demand from the government what has been taken away over the decades".

A Matter of Equity: Freedom of Faith in Secular India, *by John Dayal, is published by New Delhi-based Anamika Publishers and Distributors Pvt Ltd, 500 pages, 800 Indian rupees.*

Indian governor blocks anti-conversion bill

CHATTISGARH, INDIA (ANS) – Another Indian state governor is attempting to block proposed amendments designed to make existing anti-conversion legislation even more stringent. Chhattisgarh Governor S.S.L. Narasimhan has voiced his opposition on two amendments proposed by the state assembly. The first would require a person who wants to change his religion to report those intentions to government officials at least 30 days in advance. The government would then have the right to grant or deny the request. Narasimhan also opposes another clause in the amendment which exempts people from the law if they are reverting from Christianity or Islam back to their native religion.

Gospel for Asia missionaries are able to continue planting churches in Chhattisgarh, where harsh anti-conversion laws are on the books.

Rajasthan state Governor Prathibha Patil also refused to sign an anti-conversion law created by the anti-Christian extremist political party in her state's assembly earlier this year.

The anti-Christian party in Chhattisgarh, which holds a majority of seats in the state's legislative body, proposed the amendments to that state's anti-conversion law in August 2006. The amendments target religious conversions classified as occurring by force or allurement.

The amendments propose fines of up to 2,000 rupees (US $50.98) and three years in jail for anyone found guilty of changing his or her faith without permission from the government. The person who led them to the new faith would be subject to the same punishment.

Rather than sign the bill, Narasimhan sent it to India's attorney general for a legal opinion. The attorney general recently disapproved of legislators attempts to make similar amendments to the anti-conversion law in Madhya Pradesh.

Christians and Muslims in Chhattisgarh – and throughout India – say the bill violates the Indian Constitution's religious freedom clause. The anti-Christian extremists claim that the law would prevent missionaries from bribing poor tribal and low-caste Indians from leaving their traditional faiths to embrace Christianity.

Several states in India have anti-conversion bills, called "freedom of religion" acts by the legislators who create them. Chhattisgarh's law has been in effect since 1968, when the state was part of neighboring Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh and Orissa were the first two states to implement and enforce anti-conversion laws.

The ruling assemblies in Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat have also approved anti-conversion legislation, but none of the states have begun to implement the laws.

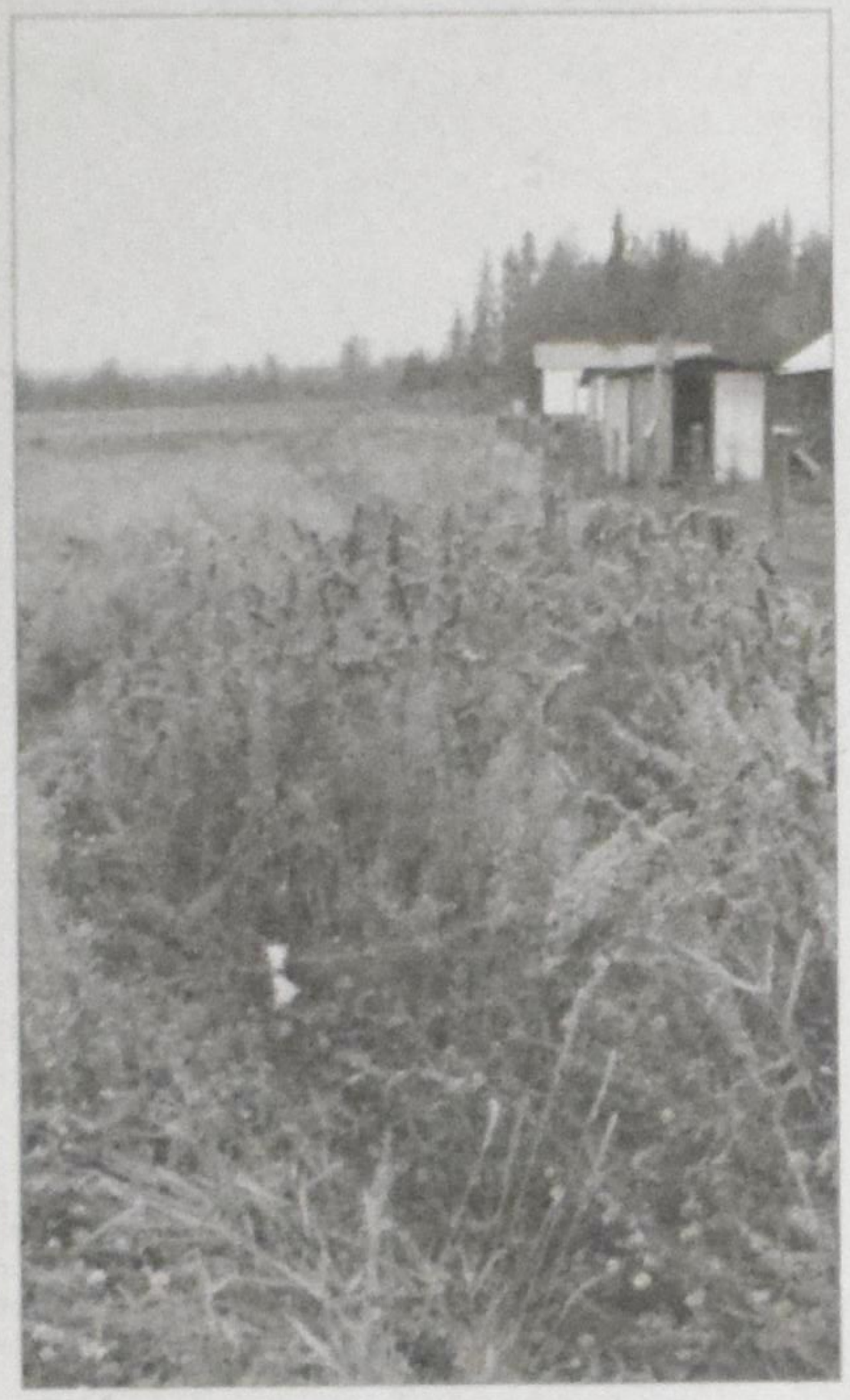
Tamil Nadu repealed its anti-conversion law in 2006.

Christians make up less than one percent of the nearly 21 million residents of Chhattisgarh. Gospel for Asia missionaries have been working in the state since 1995. During that time, they have planted several churches and started a Bible school to train new missionaries. The state also has an active film ministry and provides for the needs of families through several Bridge of Hope centers.

GFA leaders in Chhattisgarh ask for prayer that the anti-conversion legislation would be overruled and that missionaries would be allowed to freely preach the Gospel without fear.

Flowers & Thistles
Curt Gesch

Neat is nice, *but a jungle is better*



Once I read an interesting analogy: an ant carrying a dead moth across the lawn is like a man carrying a one-engine airplane through a jungle. I don't really know if this is true, and I'm not interested in carrying airplanes anyway, but the whole topic of jungles fascinates me.

I enjoy pretending I'm a jungle-dweller when I take my machete and chop up sunflower stalks. Maybe the closest I ever actually got to walking through a jungle is walking through a west-coast forest: partly on top of slippery logs, partly on the ground, over deadfalls, around trees, skirting devil's club spines, and generally walking like a man failing a roadside sobriety test.

And so I'm writing to those of you who don't live in the jungle, or even a forest, but who dwell in the wilderness of your own yards.

My yard – that which is not grass – has been turned into gardens: flower gardens and vegetable gardens. I try my best to make things interesting by placing plants in clumps and clusters ("never in even numbers", says my mentor, Teryl Schopfer) or as solo (accent) plants. I plant my vegetables in rows, sometimes, but not *long* rows. Short rows of beets may border a couple cabbages, and potatoes (in nice, straight, hilled-up rows) may have to be restrained from rural sprawl by a row of sunflowers.

But gardens need cleaning up or so I've been told. There is something lovely about seeing a garden plot cleaned-up, maybe rototilled, edged and ready for spring. But there is also something to be said for the decadence of early fall:

Bright yarrows bordering helter-skelter stalks of delphinia;
a late pink sedum strutting its stuff among browned poppies;
lavatera – blooms faded and leaves shrivelled with broken, thick stalks looking like a whirlwind just went through;
a leek gone to seed;
drooping-headed sunflowers still standing on stems as big as 40-year-old Arctic black spruce;
perennial babies breath sprawling all over everything in a ragged globe;
red currants glowing unpicked on undisciplined bushes.

I'm not the only one who likes this extravagence of ripeness and decay: the birds love it, too. Juncos hop in openings, especially interested in cosmos gone-to-seed; jays investigate any and every source of food; chickadees and hairy woodpeckers go after sunflower seeds. And the sparrows (the true sparrows not those European interlopers) swarm through every jungle, flitting here and there, on the ground, on a stalk, on a flower, scratching in the leaves like bantam bantams, throwing soil and debris this way and that. We see white-crowned sparrows, the odd chipping sparrow, an occasional fox sparrow, a golden-crowned sparrow and legions of dark-phase song sparrows. These last critters seem to explode from any sort of flower or vegetable jungle.

There: I've said it. *Jungle*. From a sparrow's perspective, your tame yard can be a jungle, a garden of earthly delights. And that's why – one of the reasons – I'm in no hurry to clean things up, as satisfying as that is.

I delay, procrastinate, and wait, partly from sloth and mostly from a desire to watch the end of things, the consummation of of the seasons in our central B.C. farmyard.

So. . . "garden all put away for the winter?" Not really. I'm waiting, waiting, and may get caught having to do some of the work in the spring. (But by then I'll be ready for some long days outside without snow.)

And sometimes I intentionally don't *ever* clean up. I insist that our neighbouring farmer leave a strip of annual weeds and volunteer clover in that wet patch next to the fence. When cropped hayfields and pastures are covered with snow, the weed-heads may still stick up, feeding a few wintering birds, and providing a welcome relief from white on white. Once, after a heavy snowfall, I saw a song sparrow – often a long-gone migrant – feeding energetically on some weeds (perhaps a nettle variety) growing on the edge of our gravel pit, scattering the snow-caps from the weeds, shaking bits of chaff all over the new snow.

Driving to Toronto through Oakville/Burlington on an absolutely horrible winter day, I saw flocks of snow buntings feeding in "vacant" ground in between housing developments and strip malls. Unfortunately, many of our cities and suburbs show "no vacancy" signs to wildlife.

*****

"Neat" sounds good to Methodist or Calvinist ears. "Messy" sounds, well, almost sinful.

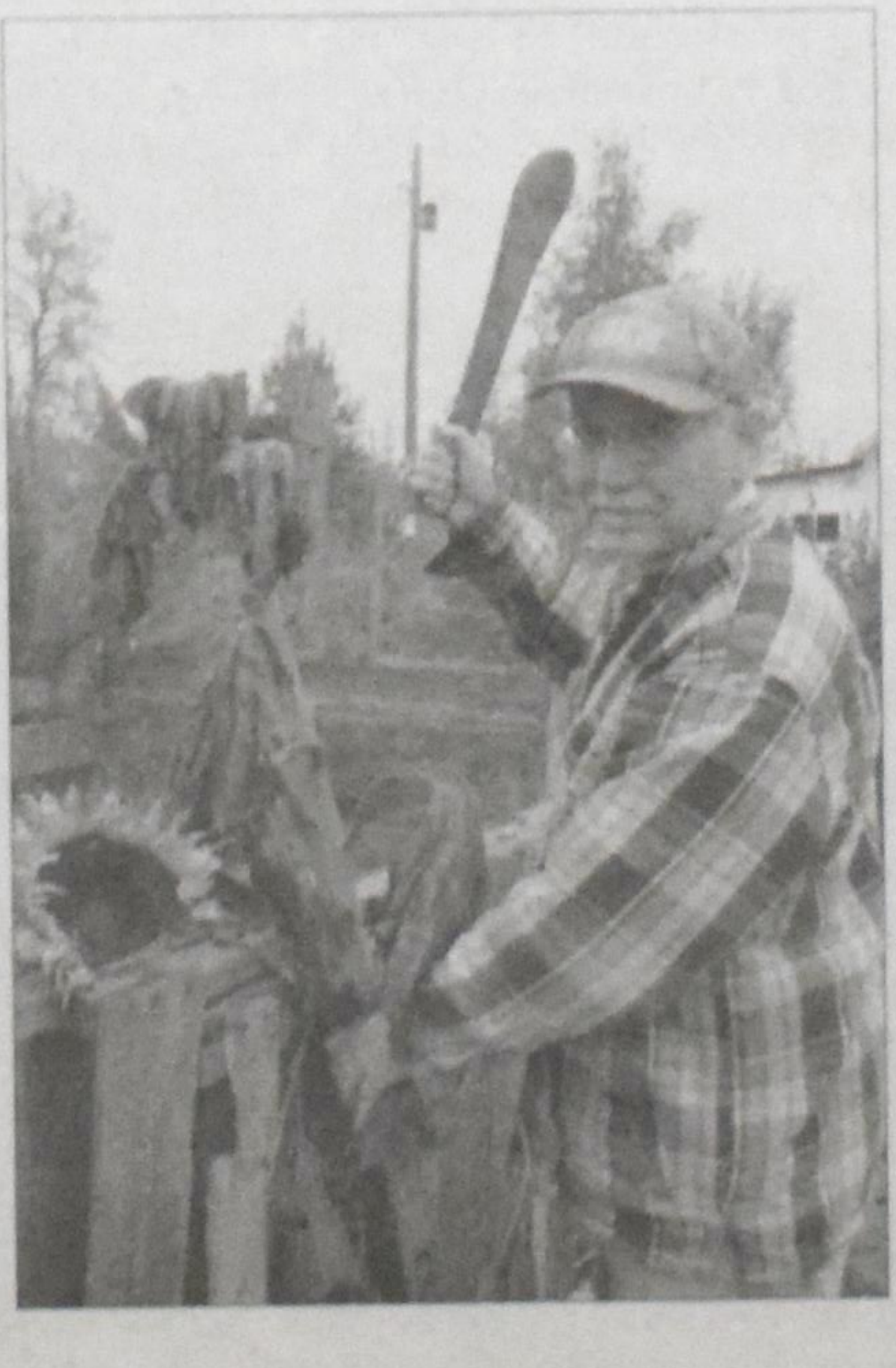
Let's just skip "messy" and say, "My garden stays *voluptuous* through the fall."

OK. Maybe *voluptuous* is more like late August. But how about *fulfilled, ripe, exuberant, giddy*.

Let's talk about yards that are rich, and fruitful,
intricate, and interwoven,
and as full as they can be of living things,
the beauties and the beholders.
Join me in the jungle sometime.

(Next October, perhaps.)

Curt Gesch is a retired schoolteacher and gardener, who can sometimes be found – stone sober – peering underneath dying flowers.



Memories

Traveling deep into the Congo

Scott Baldauf

A reporter encounters reverence, hostility – and detention – in his journey into the war-racked southern African nation.

GOMA, CONGO – After a week in the villages of eastern Congo, I think I know what it must be like to be Madonna.

Let me explain.

I haven't adopted a child amid controversy and haven't recently adopted an esoteric faith. I haven't recorded albums, altered fashion tastes, or demonstrated the sort of talent that people pay money to see. But I know what it is to set off a frisson of excitement in every town I pass through.

I have even become known to strangers by a single name: "mzungu." The word, in Swahili, means "white guy," but let's not quibble over details. I'm huge in eastern Congo.

I have just returned from a reporting trip covering a guerrilla insurgency between an ethnic Tutsi militia and the Congolese government. To provide balance, the trip required driving into the zone controlled by the Tutsi rebel general, Laurent Nkunda, as well as spending time inside government territory around the city of Goma itself. Passing across battle lines always contains elements of risk, something all of us reporters accepted before taking the trip, but something we would experience in full before the odyssey ended.

Driving through the government checkpoint was simple: There wasn't anybody there. Nobody quizzed us about who we were and where we were going. Next came the UN peacekeepers, who waved. About 100 yards later, we met the Nkunda rebels. We descended from our cars, shook hands, and introduced ourselves. One of the men I shook hands with, I later discovered, was an accused war criminal, Gen. Ntaganda Bosco. "I'm just visiting," he told me. "Me, too," I replied.

The front lines of the stubborn war divide the town of Sake in half. While the government side of the city is busy, thriving with commercial activity, the Nkunda side is a ghost town. The only civilians are women and young children, carrying belongings on their head toward temporary relief camps, away from the front lines.

Once outside Sake, all signs of war disappear. Farmers are busy planting crops. Herders are leading cows across the green hillsides of volcanic plains that resemble Switzerland. Women are pounding cassava roots into paste. And children are chasing cars full of reporters and shouting, "mzungu!"

As a reporter in India, I got used to having village children shouting "gora," which is the Hindi version of "mzungu." On a trip to a remote town in Madhya Pradesh, one child looked at me and screamed "bhoot!" which means ghost. To some Indian eyes, the pale European pallor looks like the skin of a corpse.

In Afghanistan, I was more able to blend in. With a full beard and long draping Afghan clothes, I could lower my profile in a country where foreigners raise suspicions. Occasionally Afghans would mistake me for a local. In the bazaar, people would stop and ask me, in Persian, for directions. I would respond, in Pashto, "I don't know."

Blending in here in Africa, of course, is more difficult, but skin color rarely has been a source of tension. Outside South Africa, where a racist legal setup kept blacks in inferior positions, and Nigeria, where white oilworkers are often kidnapped, Africans seem to have few qualms about Western visitors. Yes, children stir up a big fuss when you come to town, but when given the chance to tell their story, adults forget petty differences.

I will never forget the apple-cheeked toddler in Kitchanga, Congo, who looked as if she had just come out of diapers. She studied us for a minute or two in silence, clinging to her mother's skirt, and then said, "mzungu." It may have been her first word.

The charm of "mzungu" is in the way it is said, the same giddy excitement that my children use when they say "candy" or "trampoline," or "candy" while on the trampoline. Yet the charm of "mzungu" starts to wear off. I'm sure my fellow single-named colleagues – Madonna, Bono, Sting – have days when they would prefer to cover up with sunglasses and

Continued on p. 15

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

The amaryllis

A year has passed since my mother died. The cemetery where she and my father are buried is more than a two hour drive from here. But somehow, on the first anniversary of her death, I felt the need to make the trip. My youngest daughter, Jessica, had the same inclination. So I picked her up after work and we drove to the little town where I grew up.

We stood at my parents' grave, arm in arm. The warm breeze rattled the drying leaves and scattered them across the lawn. Although the temperature felt like summer, the scent of the air and the weakening sunlight verified it was autumn. "It's the kind of day Oma would have enjoyed," I said to Jess. It reminded me of one of the last times I saw her. We sat in the garden of the nursing home. The wind ruffled her hair and she lifted her face toward the sun, eyes closed. A childlike smile crossed her lips and she let out a contented sigh. She had never looked happier. I assumed senility had obliterated her anxieties.

Now Jess and I stared at the silent gravestone, each of us lost in her own thoughts. A few tears rolled down my cheeks and I turned to see Jess crying too. I gave her a hug, feeling helpless to comfort her. We reminisced a bit about my mom, then strolled around the cemetery. Reading some of the headstones I noticed the names of former neighbours, a couple of women I had worked with as a teenager, and a few parents of childhood friends. I told Jessica some of their stories. But I didn't tell her the thought that crossed my mind: *this is where we all end up – some sooner, others later,* a depressing notion on such a lovely afternoon. Death leaves an ugly stain on God's good creation.

Later, as we drove around town I showed Jess the schools I attended. We looked at the two houses my family had lived in and toured the neighborhoods where I used to play. I showed her where some of my friends lived, the creek I used to skate on and the "downtown," barely recognizable from when I was a kid. I told her stories of how somebody stole a school bus one foggy night and drove it into the house at the end of our street, and how every Halloween someone would try to set the annex behind the high school on fire. We passed the fairgrounds, the restaurant where I worked as a teen (long since closed) and the church where Jack and I were married.

When I dropped Jess off at the end of the evening, I felt glad we had gone and thankful that my daughter had accompanied me. But the sadness lingered as I drove home alone. Childhood seemed lost in the mists of time. The village that once had been my whole world was radically different than I remembered it. Even my parents were no longer there.

The next morning I came across these words in Isaiah 40: "All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it."

The reference to the flower prompted me to think of the amaryllis bulb sitting on the shelf in our fruit cellar. A friend gave it to me as a token of sympathy after Ma died. It came in a box with a little bag of "planting medium" (soil) and a pot. The instructions were simple: put the dirt in the pot, the bulb in the dirt, water it once in a while and watch what happens. I examined the dry, brown bulb, finding it hard to believe that any kind of life would come out of it. But I had nothing to lose, so I followed the directions and waited.

Several weeks after my mother died, a letter arrived from a Christian woman who had spent many hours visiting Ma in the nursing home. I learned that my mother had the assurance of peace with God before she died. She knew Christ as Savior. It seemed too good to be true, but I had every reason to believe that God graciously answered our prayers of thirty years and called Ma home to heaven. Our grief was now tempered with the miraculous joy of knowing that Ma was in a better place and that we would see her again one day.

Meanwhile, bright green shoots sprouted from that dried out bulb. They grew taller every day.

Just after Christmas, three pure white blooms burst open and brought their glory to our living room. The amaryllis became a symbol for me of how only God can bring life to that which was dead, and how we always have hope, as long as we have God, regardless of grim appearances.

I read on in Isaiah into chapter 43, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine." It doesn't get much more personal or hopeful than that, does it?

I'd be lying if I said the gloom ended then and there. The fact is that I continued feeling blue for more than a week. Those who know me best have seen it before and give their love and prayers freely. Gradually hope offset the melancholy. Proper perspective returned. Almighty God is in control and he is always good. Death is something we all face, but thanks to God we don't face it alone and life does not end in the grave. I brought the amaryllis up from the basement today. I watered it and put it in the living room windowsill. It's time to watch and see what God will do.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com

Movie review

The Western as a modernist allegory: *3:10 to Yuma*

Harry der Nederlanden

Evans and his two sons

The Western, repeatedly declared dead, keeps making a comeback. This movie, *3:10 to Yuma* is based on a very short story by Elmore Leonard, and it is the second movie based on this story. We all realize that very few Westerns show us the early West as it really was, even when they affect a certain realism of style. But there's something about the Western that keeps bringing filmmakers back to it.

There's a spareness about the Western that makes it akin to allegory. There's the solitary man (it's mostly about men) thrown on his own resources set against the wide open spaces of the West. The landscape is usually beautiful to look at but hard on those who try to settle it. And human beings can be just as dangerous and deadly as the mountains and the deserts, for the law and civilization have not yet entirely tamed them. Brute power and the gun, violence rather than law threaten to reduce human society to a constant state of war in which the most violent walk away with the spoils.

The opening scene of the movie introduces us to the two main characters. An armored, well defended stagecoach is attacked by notorious bandit Ben Wade and his gang. The stage seems about to escape the attack, when Wade cleverly drives a herd of cattle grazing in the valley into the path of the stage. It overturns and the outlaws execute the guards – except for one. Wade stops his bloodthirsty lieutenant from shooting the grizzled, ornery man who was riding shotgun. He's a tough old bounty hunter who had pursued Ben Wade in the past, and the outlaw, who recognizes him, seems to get a kick out of that fact and spares him.

The holdup is observed from a steep hill by a rancher and his two sons. The older son recognizes the leader of the gang and speaks his name with awe. Ben Wade's exploits are, thus, widely known, and perhaps even celebrated. He's bent upon making a name for himself and well on his way toward becoming a legend.

The bandits spot the threesome watching from on high and charge up the hill toward them. The rancher, Dan Evans, tells his sons not to run. Although his bloodthirsty lieutenant would like to, Ben Wade does not execute them as potential witnesses but treats them politely. He does take their horses so they can't ride into town and send a posse after them. However, he promises that he will tether their horses a few miles down the road, and he makes good on that promise. So the outlaw leader is a strange mix of ruthlessness and civility.

When the rancher, Dan Evans, arrives at home, we learn that he is on the verge of bankruptcy, his wife is weary and disillusioned, his oldest son contemptuous and disrespectful. He sees himself as a failure, a loser. He is a wounded man, having lost his one leg in the Civil War. Evans goes to town to plead with his banker for more time to meet his payment. But the railroad wants his land, and so the banker is eager to get him off of it.

Two contrasting characters. On the one hand, a man who has deliberately set himself outside of lawful society and whose greatest pleasure is defying the authorities. To him being an outlaw and killer is all a game, a violent, lethal game. He carries it off with charm and class, even quoting Scripture now and again, but the bodies keep stacking up.

The rancher Evans is also an outsider, not by choice, but as a reject, a victim. He has worked hard to belong, but now all the mechanisms of society – banks, railroad, law – conspire to dispossess him.

All the violence, we are made to see, is not on the outlaw's side. The institutions that are civilizing the West impose a violence of their own. At one point in the film, we get a glimpse of Chinese laborers hacking a tunnel through the mountains for the railroad and of the brutal men supervising the work. This combination of the railroad, the banks and the law is imposing its order, its power, on the wild West. Wade has, however, set himself above and against this establishment. The rancher, on the other hand, finds himself being crushed beneath it.

Signing on to the escort

When Evans goes to town to plead his case with the banker, the lives of the rancher and the outlaw again intersect. To flaunt his superiority to the forces of law, the outlaw Ben Wade has sneaked into town just after the posse has left in pursuit of him and his gang. While the posse is searching for him in the hills, he is taking a break in the town saloon with a saloon woman.

However, the next morning he is spotted entering the saloon again and someone rides to fetch the Marshall and the Pinkertons (a police force for hire).

Meanwhile, Evans the rancher summons up the brass to walk into the saloon and confront the famous outlaw at the bar. Two of his cows got killed when Wade drove them into the path of the stage, Evans tells Wade. So he owes him the price of two cows. Amused and impressed by the rancher's boldness, the outlaw pays up.

While Evans has been distracting him, however, he has been surrounded and Ben Wade is a prisoner. This is where the main plot begins. Ben Wade may be a prisoner, but his gang of cutthroats is still on the loose, and there is no doubt that they will try to free him. The outlaw has to be transferred as quickly as possible to the state prison in Yuma, but the nearest railroad station is in a town some 80 miles away in the town of Contention. There he will be put on the 3:10 to Yuma.

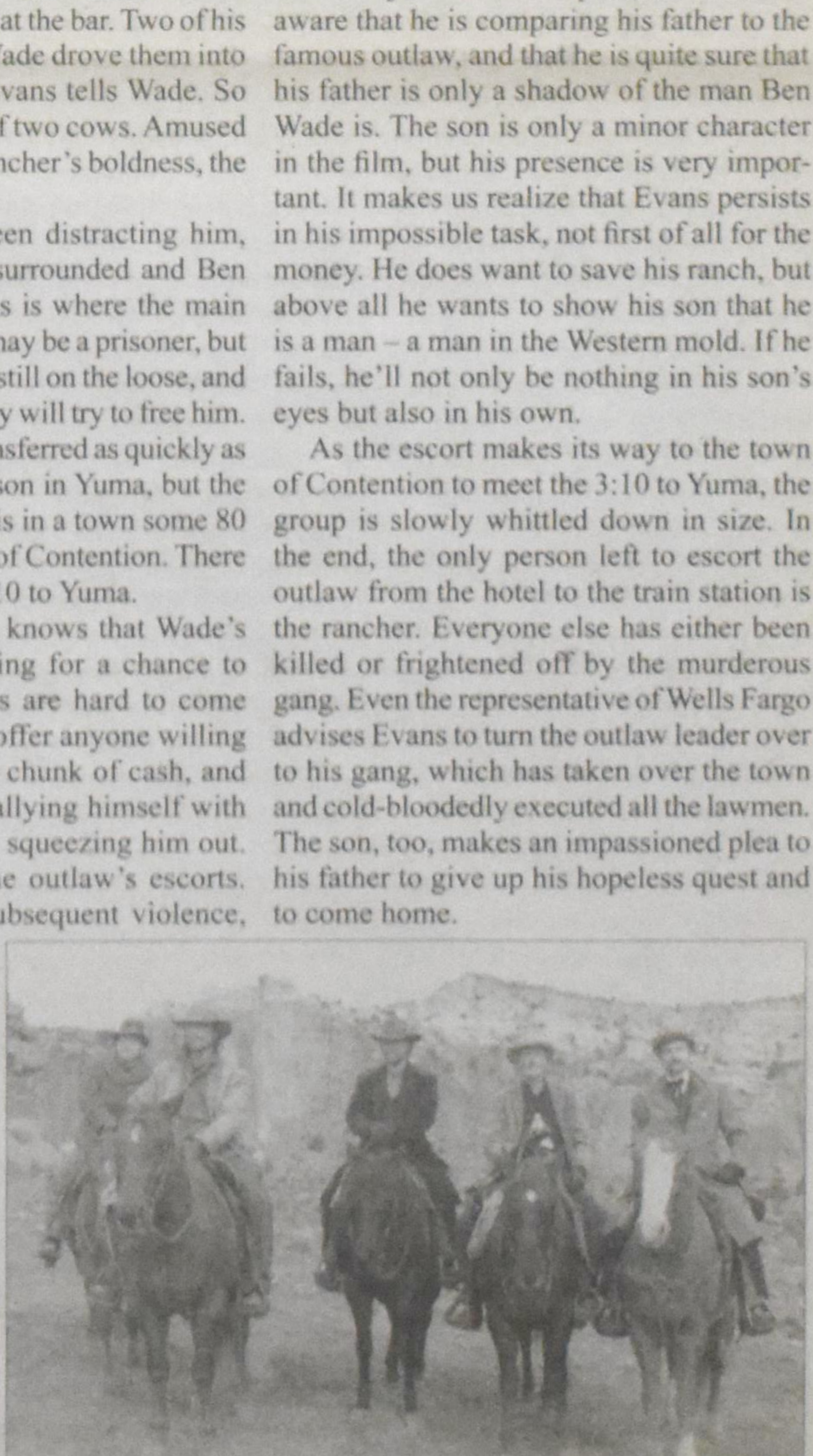
Everyone, however, knows that Wade's gang is out there waiting for a chance to free him, so volunteers are hard to come by. But the Pinkertons offer anyone willing to be deputized a good chunk of cash, and Evans takes the offer, allying himself with the very forces that are squeezing him out. He becomes one of the outlaw's escorts. And through all the subsequent violence, the story develops a strange relationship between the two men. Each elicits something from the other as they chase across the Western landscape, eluding the Wade gang, Comanches and rogue railroad men bent on murder.

The film is packed with violent action, but the most interesting level of action is the interaction between the two men during lulls in the action. Wade taunts Evans about his inability to care for his wife and family, but at he same time he shows him more respect than the others in the escort, becoming almost protective at times. Evans in turn probes the outlaw to find out what makes him tick. In a sense, the men feed off each other, even while they are committed to opposite ways. Both are intent on seeking to be men – men in the heroic mold – in a society that reduces men to pawns of the economic order. Civilization involves a certain emasculation: it makes it harder for a man to be a real man, one who determines his own course.

The eyes of the son

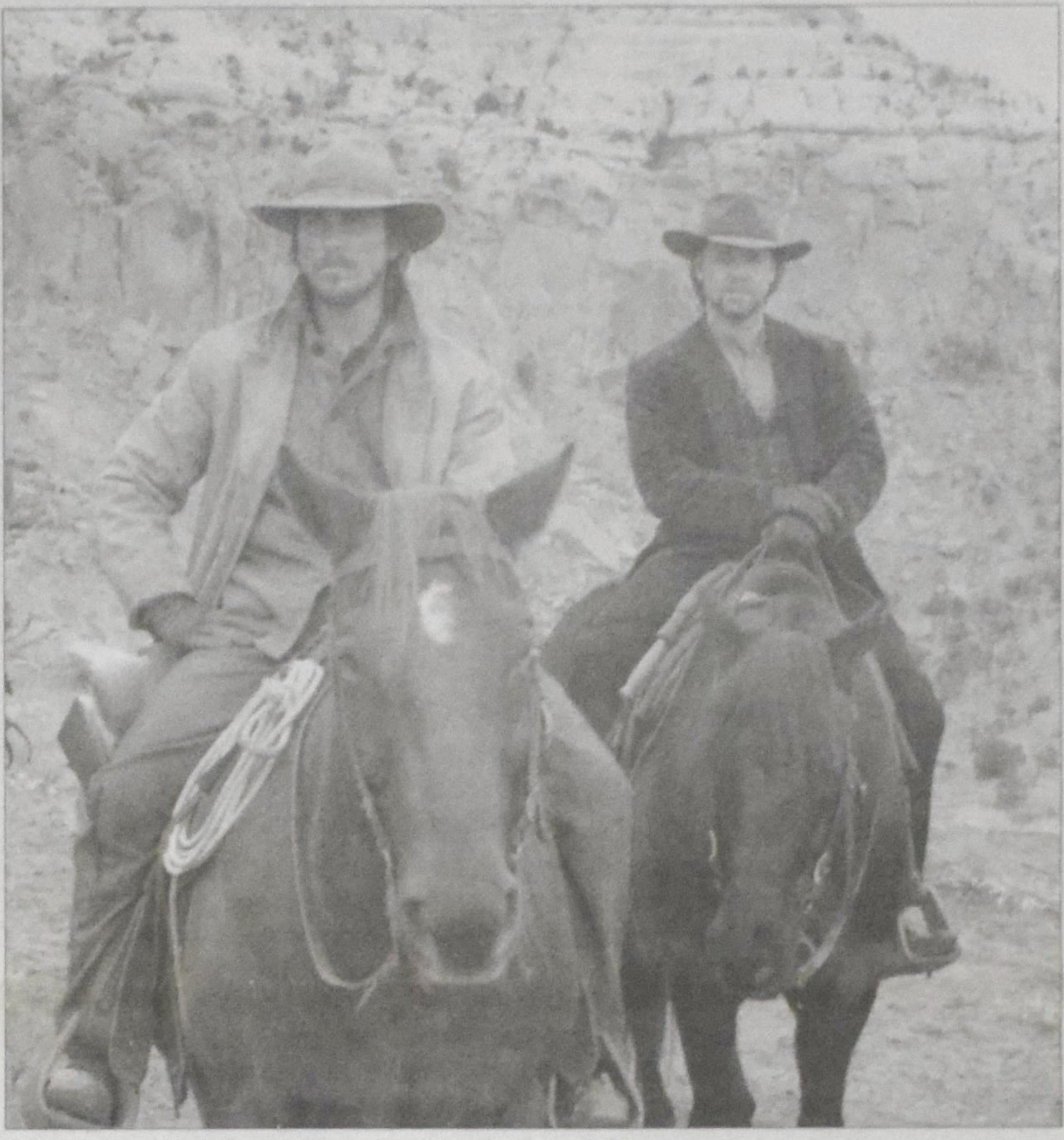
At a crucial point in the story, the rancher's son, determined to prove himself, catches up with the escort to join them. His presence makes us aware that he is comparing his father to the famous outlaw, and that he is quite sure that his father is only a shadow of the man Ben Wade is. The son is only a minor character in the film, but his presence is very important. It makes us realize that Evans persists in his impossible task, not first of all for the money. He does want to save his ranch, but above all he wants to show his son that he is a man – a man in the Western mold. If he fails, he'll not only be nothing in his son's eyes but also in his own.

As the escort makes its way to the town of Contention to meet the 3:10 to Yuma, the group is slowly whittled down in size. In the end, the only person left to escort the outlaw from the hotel to the train station is the rancher. Everyone else has either been killed or frightened off by the murderous gang. Even the representative of Wells Fargo advises Evans to turn the outlaw leader over to his gang, which has taken over the town and cold-bloodedly executed all the lawmen. The son, too, makes an impassioned plea to his father to give up his hopeless quest and to come home.


The outlaw and his escort

Movie review

Ben Wade with guards



Dan Evans (Christian Bale) and Ben Wade (Russel Crowe)

Common quest

The rancher's stubborn persistence really makes little or no sense. The gang of eight gunmen has the hotel staked out so that there is little or no chance of his making it to the train alive. He is as much a prisoner as his prisoner. Yet, it is this obsessive commitment of the rancher to the task that he has embraced that lifts this film to another level. It prompts us to pay attention to the allegorical elements in the film. This is more than a shoot-'em-up Western, though there's plenty of that too. But it also poses serious worldview questions.

At the climax of the story, when the rancher must run the gauntlet through the gang of waiting gunmen to get his prisoner to the train, a strange switch takes place. Evans, no gunman himself, hasn't the breath of a chance of making it. But at the critical moment, the outlaw Ben Wade seems to enter into the spirit of the challenge. It is he, rather than the rancher, who leads the mad charge through a hail of bullets to the waiting train. The outlaw and the deputized rancher are suddenly bound together in this common quest. As they dive for cover in the railroad station, there is a moment of mutual recognition.

Is this simply another version of the theme that there are no good guys and bad guys – only gray, with violence and evil on both sides? There are hints of this in the film. But it probes deeper. The film doesn't seek to represent the outlaw as less evil than he is. He and his gang are portrayed as nothing less than ruthless killers. However, Wade with his playful, teasing charm and civilized behavior seems to have embraced the outlaw life as a game, an adventure, a way of being outside the rules of civil society. He is not a desperado in the sense of desperate; he is not driven by necessity. He teases the law and its minions out of a sense of superiority. There is something almost Nietzschean about him – beyond good and evil.

Paradoxically, it is this, I think, that draws the outlaw into the rancher's impossible quest of completing his mission and delivering Wade to the 3:10 to Yuma Prison. His cooperation is not first of all prompted by a moment of goodness or redemption or compassion for the rancher – unless one counts recognition of stubborn heroism a form of goodness. In the heat of the moment, he seems to become seized by the rancher's "game" or story as more admirable than his own.

Modernist allegory

So the film is very much a modernist allegory. The Western frontier is evoked, as it often is, as a time when, despite the lawlessness, and because of it, men had an chance to rise to true heroic stature. Without the constraints of law, civilization and the attendant world of moneygrubbers, men were able to assert themselves as self-determining, self-sufficient beings in a wide open, as yet unshaped world. There were no standards or duties imposed upon them (so the myth goes), and therefore they were wholly self-made men. But this heroic self-assertion was at the same time an act of violence – an imposition of will on wild nature as well as on others (Indians, Chinese coolies). So this form of self-assertion cannot be tolerated in the new bourgeois society of law-and order in which men are reduced to pawns of the rich and powerful.

Rancher Evans and son

In the end, we see the hard-working but despised rancher opting for the heroic mode – even if it means his death. Like the outlaw, he rejects the conditions the new order offers for being a man. It reduces him to the status of victim, loser, nothing. Instead, he completely identifies with the heroic mission he has undertaken, a mission that conjoins him with the outlaw he has sworn to bring to justice.

This is somewhat reminiscent of the Miltonic theme that good comes into its own only by meeting the challenge of evil. Milton wrote in his Areopagitica: "Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably.... It was from the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into this world."

There is a crucial difference, however, between Milton's twinning of good and evil and the twinning in this film of the rancher and the outlaw. In the Christian worldview, there are transcendent standards by which to discern good from evil, saint from sinner, hero from villain. In modernity those overarching standards were gradually wiped from the horizon so that man finds himself in a limitless, uncharted frontier – one in which he has no choice but to assert his own standards of manliness and humanity, virtue and heroism. The only purposes and ends in this world are a result of human will, a self-projection.

Both men, whether in the name of goodness or evil, whether in the service of law or in defiance of it, must perform this act of self-assertion, a basically violent act. Human culture and human status, in this view, are rooted in violence. This is an ancient view: the ancient Greeks, too, saw our humanity and culture not first of all as a gift but as a theft from the gods. Prometheus was the mediator and thief who stole fire and the light of culture and reason from the gods – and was condemned to pay for the transgression forever.

It is this quandary, both ancient and modernist, played out in the allegorical landscape of the Wild West, that the film 3:10 to Yuma explores. The film doesn't exactly do a masterful job of it. It is self-indulgent at points. But it does have enough integrity to make it worth seeing and thinking about.

Corinthians

Death is being vanquished

We have been following Van Ruler as he led us through the book of Ecclesiastes, in many ways a dark book that delves deeply into the absurdities of human life. Yet, even as the Preacher bangs his head against those intransigent facts of existence that do not seem to rhyme with his confession of a good Creator and a good creation, he holds on to God as Redeemer as well as Creator.

Van Ruler was very careful in his reflections on Ecclesiastes not to leap ahead prematurely to the good news in Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament. But in his reflections on I Corinthians 15, the great chapter on the resurrection, he helps us to peer into the darkness of death and to come away with hope and joy. It is an excellent follow-up to his meditations on Ecclesiastes.

Harry

The historical basis of salvation

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

I Corinthians 15:1,2

A.A. van Ruler

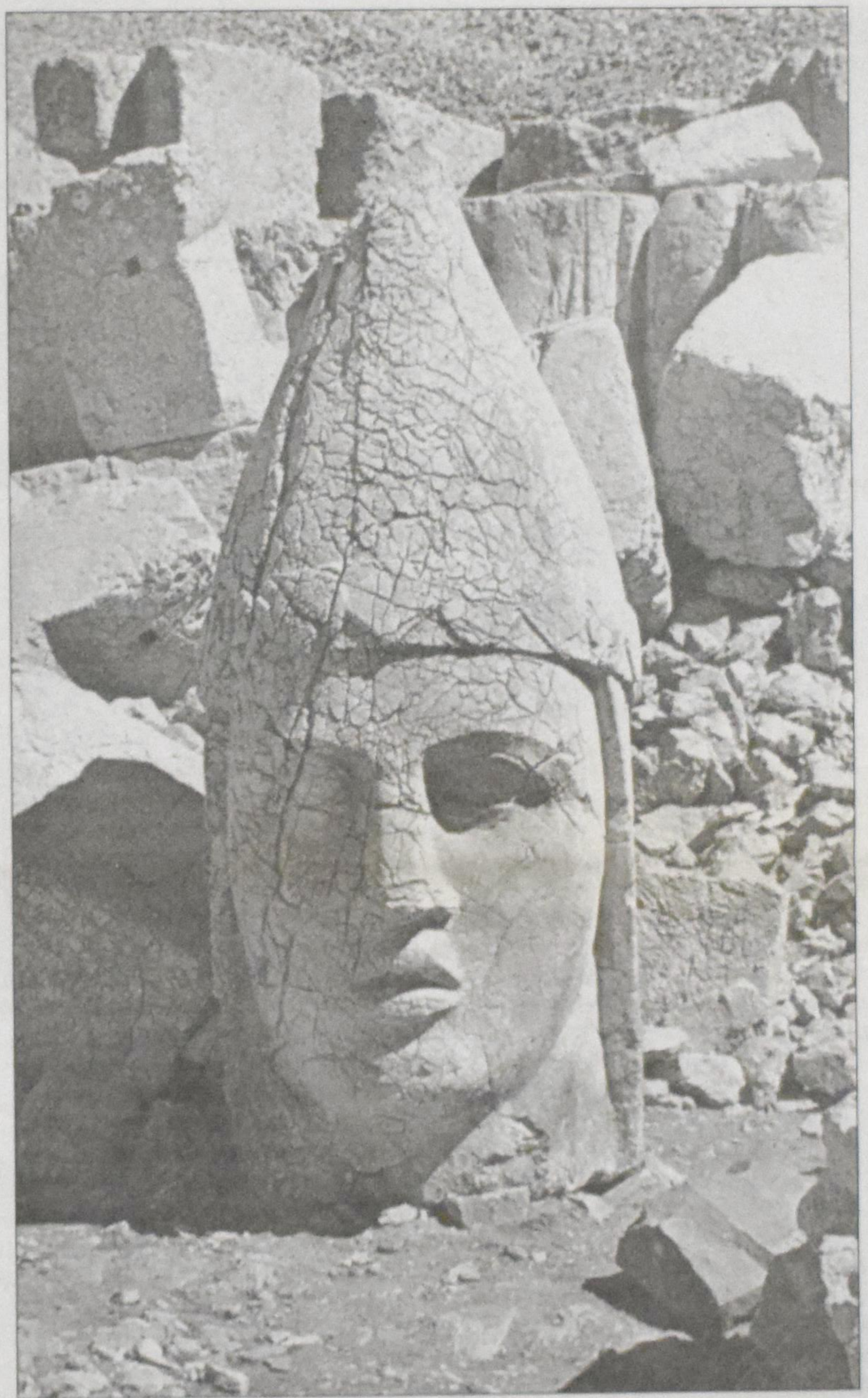
In I Corinthians 15 Paul suddenly begins to talk about the big theme of the resurrection from the dead. In the foregoing chapters he has been discussing very different things. Apparently from his correspondence with the church there he has learned that some members of the congregation, perhaps in all naivete, have been challenging this central teaching of the gospel.

Even then the energetic and somewhat vehement way in which he suddenly launches into the topic is surprising. He, as it were, barges in without so much as an introduction. But this isn't the only time he does so when the core of the Christian faith is at stake. One cannot approach that core by gradually reasoning toward it. One can only declare what God has done in history. Here our thinking very noticeably takes on the character of witness.

Paul expresses himself in a typical manner. He says, "I remind you of the gospel I preached to you." (The King James version has: "I declare to you....") We'd be inclined to say, "Well, is this really necessary?" For we have come to know the central points of the gospel quite well. But this is part of Paul's vehemence. You might almost say that he is angry, and that he's saying, "Listen, once again I'm making the gospel known to you!"

But perhaps this is going a bit too far. Still, it suggests that we have to tell over and over again what God has done in history. And this telling of God's redemptive acts calls them into being in the present, or at least poses them anew in the present. This also happens in the sacraments: in baptism and the Lord's supper Christ is made present in his death and resurrection. This also happens, perhaps even more actually, in the preaching of the gospel. In this sense, all preaching is certainly a making known of what has long has been known.

Paul is very aware of this. He doesn't only assert himself here in his office as apostle. He doesn't only set himself over against the church by coming to it with his apostolic peaching. In his declaration of the acts of salvation he also appeals to the congregation. He says, this is the gospel which you received. The congregation doesn't stand beneath the preaching of the gospel like a blank sheet of paper. The paper has long ago been inscribed. The congregation stands in the tradition in which the apostolic gospel has been passed from country to country, from people to people, from person to person, and from age to age.



"An idol is nothing at all...," says Paul in I Cor. 8:4

This is what Paul also reminds us of. He says, This is the gospel I preached to you – and then this wonderful thing happened: you received it, accepted it, acknowledged it and made it your own. Now both know it, apostle and congregation, God and man. This insight – that we don't stand before God voiceless, but that with God we may have knowledge of the hidden things of salvation as a historical reality – is of huge importance.

At the same time, Paul also takes us to the core of his message in this connection. He also adds that the congregation has taken its stand on this gospel. This is the issue of the foundation, the basis, the ground of the Christian church and of the Christian faith. This foundation is not the church's teachings or its dogma. Nor is it in the Christian's life or heart. In all simplicity it is located in the proclamation of the gospel, that is to say, in the declaration of the hidden things of God's acts of salvation as historical reality. Paul has in mind here first of all the cross and Christ's resurrection. These are acts, facts that happened in history. The gospel makes these known to us. And when we acknowledged them, we came to stand on the rock-solid foundation of God's love – as a reality in history. We must not allow ourselves to be moved from this foundation, Paul wants to say. Our salvation depends on it: "By this gospel you are saved."

Yes, but what does this mean? That when we die we will go to heaven? Or that at the last judgment we will be placed at God's right hand? Yes, that too. But what Paul calls "salvation" here is much broader. He means that we must look the utter lostness and meaninglessness of all that is squarely in the eye and that we may know that in this bottomless abyss we are nevertheless carried and saved. This is the power of Christ's resurrection. This is the historical reality by which we *will be* saved and by which we *are being* saved – and by which we *are already* saved.

So everything depends upon our simply clinging to this fact, that we persevere in this reality. This is why Paul says, "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you." So it is a matter of effort and striving, of persistence and faithfulness – to live permanently (and also die) on this foundation laid in history.

There is a need for precision here. Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians hold fast to the word, we might say, to the formulation, or in any case to the meaning, of what he has preached to them. This one of those nuisances of the Christian faith: again and again with unyielding stubborness we are nailed down to specific givens – to historical facts or formulations of the gospel. Christianity is after all a historical religion. In a word, the whole of salvation stands or falls with Christ's resurrection.

"Otherwise, you have believed in vain," says Paul. Otherwise you'd be without ground or hope. This is no real possibility for him. He mentions it only to stress that this is an all or nothing issue. Anyone who does not cling to the gospel precisely as it was proclaimed by the apostle is clinging to nothing. He is holding on to nothing, an emptiness, a soap bubble that will burst sooner or later.

Without the mystery of the resurrection, faith and coming to faith is a meaningless business in which nothing happens. Then we are clinging to a false god – one on which we will hang ourselves on it for time and eternity.

Travel

Congo... *continued from p.11*

scarf. But like them, we just waved – and waved.

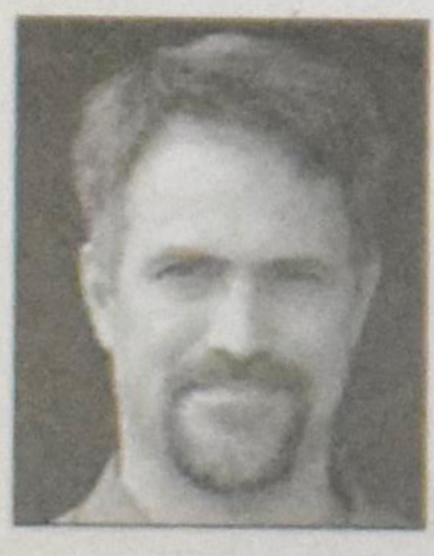
The next day, when it was time to leave rebel territory and head back to Goma, the children started yelling "Olela, mzungu," which means, "Bye-bye, white guy." And for the next two bone-jarring hours in a 4x4, that's what we heard. And we waved.

When we arrived at the government front lines in Sake, I realized that "mzungu" can have a much darker connotation. Boulders had been rolled across the road to block our passage. Police in riot gear held back angry crowds. Word had gotten out that some cars would be returning, full of foreigners who were supporting the rebel General Nkunda. When men used the word "mzungu," banging on our car windows with their fists, it felt racist and ugly.

After authorities escorted us from the angry crowds, confiscated our cameras and recording devices, and subjected us to nearly six hours of detention and questioning by police and military officials, we were allowed to return to our hotels. Eventually, our equipment was returned. But my work was not finished.

A few days later, I went back to the town with the angry crowds. I was writing a story about the emergency response of humanitarian aid to those displaced by the fighting. To do this piece, I had to meet with people who were living, by the tens of thousands, in huts made of bent saplings, thatch, and sheets of plastic. Every night, the torrential rains crept under their tents, drenching the occupants. Their belongings were a few pots and pans, some clothing, only what they could carry on their backs.

Just days before, some of these people may have been prepared to stone me as a presumed supporter of the men who expelled them from their homes. That day they told me their stories.



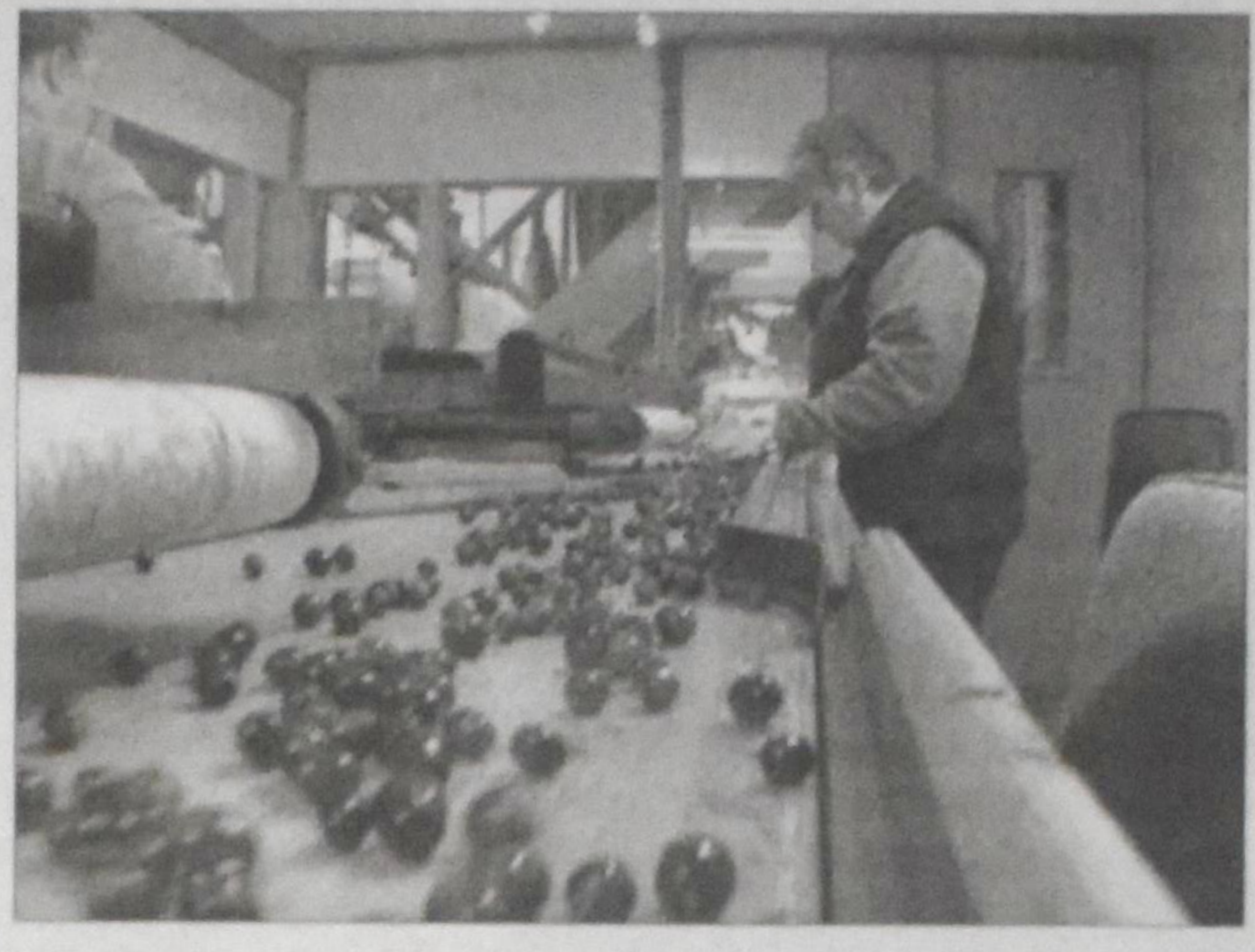
I looked around me to take in the magnitude of the human suffering. And then I looked down. There were two young boys, giving an army salute. One smiled and said, "Hello, mzungu."

Scott Baldauf is a reporter with the Christian Science Monitor.

Phenomenal marketing at Bala Cranberry Festival

Country Living
M. van der Galien

I'm trying to find some words that best describe the Bala Cranberry Festival. Incredible. Surprising. Excellent marketing. Crowds. Shocking. Amusing. Crazy. Yes, crazy, too.



Comedian Rick Mercer was there during the cranberry harvest and did an entertaining piece, which aired on the Rick Mercer Report on October 16 and 19. One of the crazy things he did was water-ski in the bog.

Not since I was in Estonia (in the Baltic) a few years ago have I seen tourists so keen on spending money on trivial things.

Bala is a small community of 500 people located in Muskoka Lakes Township where Lake Muskoka drains into Moon River. It's called "The Town of Bridges" and is a two-hour drive north of Toronto in the beautiful Georgian Bay area.

For the past 22 years, Bala has welcomed visitors to its Cranberry Festival on the weekend after Thanksgiving. The first year 1,000 people visited the event. Now 20,000 people come. The entire town is a showcase. There are more than 300 arts, crafts and food vendors offering everything cranberry.

Rick Mercer harvesting cranberries

The first thing we did in Bala was to check out Johnson's Cranberry Marsh. That's where Rick Mercer had been. They are five km out of town down a windy narrow road. The Iroquois Cranberry Growers are about 25 km away. This is cranberry country – the biggest in the province.

Tour buses take sightseers to Johnson's. I counted 11 big buses the morning we were there. It was raining but that didn't seem to matter to anyone.

People were eager to get on the covered wagons for the 10-minute bumpy ride to see where the cranberries grow. The wagon ride cost $5.00. People waited in a big tent that was adjacent to the cranberry field. A tractor pulled two covered wagons filled to capacity each trip. People sat on wooden benches.

We watched in amazement as one elderly woman, with a walker, was determined to have her walker with her as she got on the wagon. The young man driving the tractor, dressed in Octoberfest clothing, said the walker could not go on the wagon and put it in the tent for safe keeping. The lady screamed it would be stolen. "We do this all the time. It will be there when you get back," he said as he jumped on the tractor.

Mae, my fiancée, and I sat on the front seat of the first wagon. The tour guide, a young woman, stood in front of us. We chatted with her while waiting. She said every year it rains during the cranberry festival but that doesn't stop people from coming. They want to go on the wagon ride.

The cranberries had all been harvested. You just saw the bare plants, which you could see from the tent area.

The tour guide told us a common misconception about cranberry production is that the beds remain flooded throughout the year. During the growing season cranberry beds are not flooded, but are irrigated regularly to maintain soil moisture. Beds are flooded in the fall to facilitate harvest and again during the winter to protect against low temperatures.

Cranberries are harvested in the fall when the fruit takes on its distinctive deep red colour. To harvest cranberries the beds are flooded with six to eight inches of water. A harvester is driven through the beds to remove fruit from the vines. Harvested cranberries float in the water and can be corralled into a corner of the bed and conveyed or pumped from the bed.

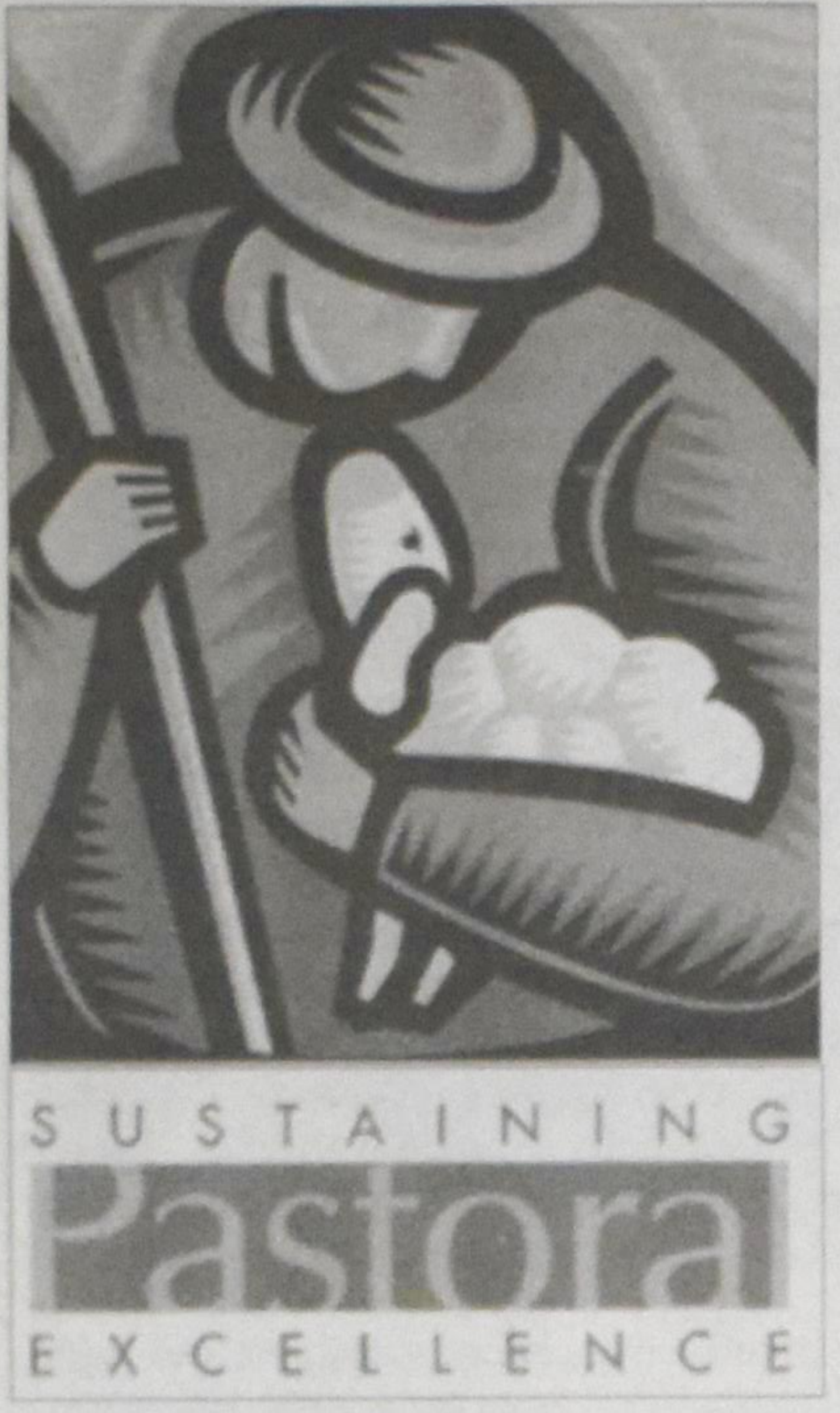
Tourists could see cranberries being sorted out and processed in the shop. We bought a 2 kg bag for $10. We sampled some cranberry wine. You could sample and buy everything cranberry you could possibly think of. Nothing was free. A sip of cranberry wine, made on site, was 50 cents. Some people sampled many different brands – all in tiny cups. People also bought bottles of cranberry wine from their winery.

We tried a cranberry candied apple on a toothpick. They were 33 cents each or 3 or for $1.00.

In town, there was no parking. Not even for the tour buses. You parked outside of town and shuttle buses brought you to town. Not our cup of tea, uh, cranberry tea.

Maynard van der Galien farms at Renfrew, Ont. He and Mae got engaged on a ferry in Georgian Bay.

Pastoral Excellence



Wednesdays with Chris:
Reflections on a Peer Learning Grant

Marc Nelesen

When a colleague gathered a group of clergy friends around a peer learning grant critiquing culture, none of us would have expected some of the fruits of our gathering. Perhaps the most significant of all was a new friendship with a waiter named "Chris".

About grants and our grant

At first, it was hard to believe. For some of us, the idea of reading books, watching movies, and then discussing our impressions over lunch seemed too good to be true. This was the project we chose however, for our grant from the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project (SPE) of the Christian Reformed Church (which received a $2 million dollar grant from Lilly Endowment Inc).

SPE encourages pastors to form a small group of peers who commit to meet together to work on something that will enrich themselves in their calling. This leaves much latitude for creativity on the part of pastors to design something that will be enriching.

Our group called ourselves the "Culture Critics". Each of us acknowledged that our commitment to parish ministry often left us a bit in the dark when it came to popular media. Several of us noted that if we walk into the local video store, the movie titles in the "new releases" section are often films that many of us know nothing about. At first glance that might sound admirable. Yet, each of the pastors in our group knows that we minister in a culture immersed in images and storylines that are foreign to us. Our grant was about gaining some fluency with the images and vocabulary of that culture. We sought to not only learn from it, but to better learn how to speak within it.

More than lunch

For nine months, five pastors gathered on the first Wednesday of the month around a dimly lit table in the balcony of the Boar's Head in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Boar's Head is a cloth-napkin variety restaurant with a casual elegance. Most of our gatherings were ones where we found ourselves surrounded by other professionals doing business lunches. More than once these men and women stopped their discussions to listen to ours. As we familiarized ourselves with one another and our friendships grew, we found ourselves looking forward to our meetings and seeing what insights each of the other group members would bring to our discussions.

Cameos

Our first meeting involved inviting William Romanowski to lunch and discussing pop culture trends. Romanowski's passion is movies. For him images on the silver screen are icons of a culture that when opened, reveal a culture adrift in its search for meaning. Occasionally, these images capture something deeply transcendent into which many can connect. Our lunch with Romanowski was a great beginning in thinking about the culture of popular media.

On another occasion, we watched the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. One of the more important aspects of this gathering was our invitation to a colleague who is gay. Our other ventures included watching episodes of the TV show "Lost" and reading John Grisham's *An Innocent Man*. The group also watched and reflected on movies that included: "Pirates of Caribbean" and the popular children's movie "Over the Hedge".

These lunchtime gatherings became occasions for growth in friendships, a widening of our understanding, and a deepening in respect for perspectives other than one's own. Monthly, we found ourselves grateful to our "abstract" benefactor named "Lilly" who continued to not only fund our gatherings, but give us a reason to gather as colleagues. Oddly, in some ways, all of these details seem like background to what has become a center point in our monthly gatherings.

Chris: our high priest of pop-culture

Our server that first Wednesday was Chris. Chris is an early thirty-something man; he is stocky, wears trendy black glasses, has jet black curly hair, and is gregarious as one could possibly imagine. Chris talks with his hands, is extremely expressive, and speaks in a voice that carries 2-3 tables away. In many respects, he is the ideal server; he is spunky, fresh, engaging, and eager to please.

It did not take long for us to recognize that entertainment media and pop culture are Chris' passion. Chris speaks of movie storylines and texts in ways that preachers often speak about their texts that form and give shape to life. If ever there was a game show that features pop-culture trivia (and I am naïve enough to be unable to name one), I would expect Chris to either be its champion or host.

Given his entertainment media savvy, it did not take Chris long to dial in to what our group was about. As soon as Chris saw our DVD packages of the TV show "Lost", he quickly moved from passionate server to engaged conversationalist.

I suppose if you were hoping to dine alone, Chris' presence and regular insertion into our conversation might have been surprising, or perhaps, unwelcome. Our group however, was about dialoguing with culture to the end of deeper learning. Who better to "text" us than one of that culture's experts? Chris quickly became one who not only resourced us in terms of themes and titles, but he put a face on both the consumers and creators of this media.

For us, these conversations with Chris gave us valuable insight. Many of these insights were beyond our own reach. Chris' ability to give us background information and his ability to integrate these themes into the popular culture was very helpful. Sometimes, it was his intensity and enthusiasm that was instructive for us. Often, it seemed as though we were keeping Chris from his other customers – but Chris loved it! Like any other enthusiastic preacher, when Chris was done engaging, he often had to re-tuck his white dress shirt before moving onto the next table.

Mutual respect, mutual appreciation

Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of these encounters with Chris was that we had mutual respect and appreciation. Chris shared with us that he grew up Roman Catholic. Because of this, he had a natural familiarity and respect for institutions and representatives of "religion" – as he called it. It was often important to him to let us know that he "believed in God" and that there were "basic truths that are valuable in all religions".

Instead of either arguing or evangelizing Chris, we chose to befriend him and sought to learn from him. As time passed, Chris' openness with us and his obvious enjoyment of engaging with us grew into a mutual cherishing. On the day we told him that we were going to watch Brokeback Mountain, Chris' eyes widened and his face lit up. "Wow", he said, "I never imagined ministers doing this kind of thing, I'm proud of you guys." These words were instructive; we not only valued the affirmation from him, but we felt saddened too, that his perception was that a film like this would be "off-limits" to Christians or clergy.

Somehow, Chris lost contact with the Church; in some ways, the Church lost connection with Chris. For me, these noon lunches where Chris was guest and host were places that the two worlds of Church and culture were once again intersecting.

The next step

Over time it seemed as though our server was an integral part of our meetings. The time that Chris was not our waiter helped us recognize how much we valued his input. On that day we decided that we needed to take things to another level with him. We would invite Chris and a few of his friends to pick a film to watch and then discuss with us over lunch. Chris was excitedly agreeable. The following month, we watched the film "The Departed" and chose a lunch location other than his place of work. To our surprise, Chris brought two friends from work; both of whom were women. The dialogue that took place at that table was probably one of the most engaging we had throughout our study grant.

Impressions

Movies, books, and media leave all kinds of images on the mind. Conversations with peers open up new levels of respect and understanding. Perhaps though, the most important learnings of this grant project were not a result of the two-dimensional images that appear on a screen. The most important learnings came through conversation, friendship, and mutual hospitality.

After nearly a year of gathering over lunch, the most significant impression left on our souls was not a line from a book or a story from a movie. What remains is a picture and a personality of one of God's image bearers who – with us – is in a restless pursuit of questions. Although we use different texts to ask and answer these questions, we found ourselves at an unexpected but welcome intersection.

Our receptivity to one another seemed to open a door for us. We find ourselves grateful to SPE and Lilly for the learnings over lunch, but we also find ourselves grateful to God for Chris. If movies and books have the power to reshape our imaginations, I have learned anew what happens to us through direct encounter with one another.

I am excited to think about what changes may come in Chris' life because he met five pastors who welcomed learning from him. I am also eager to think about the ways a server will continue to linger in my imagination because of our Wednesdays with Chris.

Note: *We did not have a picture of Chris so we used a substitute.*

Mildred Budge sows a wild oat (or not)

Daphne Simpkins

When my friend Mildred Budge feels like sowing a wild oat, she makes a left-hand turn when a right-hand turn would have been a safer choice.

Her most recent veering from the safest path occurred last Sunday when Mildred was asked to lead the morning prayer in Sunday school without any advance notice. She said yes. Then she didn't follow the usual prayer route.

For there is an accepted structure in leading the morning prayer in Sunday school. First, you read a piece of scripture from the Bible, and if you can't find one that you think fits, you simply quote from a psalm.

Mildred didn't do either one. She bowed her head, and the next thing we all knew, she was practically shouting Ezekiel images at us instead – something about dry bones coming to life. I was wondering why she didn't choose that sweet verse about having our youth being renewed like an eagle's instead when she launched right into a full-blown prayer that 1) did not begin with thanksgiving or a confession of sin, and 2) did not ask for prayer requests from her classmates either, and many of us count on that time to catch up with the week's news!

Honestly, I opened my eyes to see if she was having some kind of fit, and she was standing kind of lopsided-like, slightly pigeon-toed and with her hands raised to the sky. Nobody does that here except the preachers, and they only do it on special occasions.

Then, with her beige slip showing a good two inches, Mildred made one left-hand turn after another in her prayer until she stopped all of a sudden and asked God to help us tell each other the truth when we needed to hear it, and to tell God the truth which is a pretty tall order because 1) You figure God knows the truth so why bend his ear? 2) It's hard to tell God everything, because eventually you get bored and the 6 o'clock news comes on and you want to know what's going on in the rest of the world.

Fear of being seen with my eyes open had caused me to close them again, but I opened them back up when Mildred said that part about telling each other the truth. I saw a lot of women wondering if Mildred had someone in particular in mind that she wanted to rebuke – or was she, bless her heart, confessing to being a sinner in front of God and everyone.

I really felt sorry for her, and promised myself that I would not agree to say the morning prayer unless I had some advance notice, because this kind of public breakdown could happen to anyone.

The end result was that poor Mildred 1) looked like an ordinary sinner who needed to 'fess up and 2) she basically dared every other church woman in Sunday school to tell her what was wrong with her.

No one said amen afterwards.

We were all afraid to and never more glad to turn in our Bibles to the lesson for the day which was unfortunately on a similar topic: the speck/plank parable, wherein we were reminded not to point out other people's speck-sized sins until we dealt with the plank-size ones in our own lives.

Poor Mildred Budge. She looked guilty as sin, and sin can be such a sore subject. We were reminded of the nature of sin during the Sunday school hour to the point that we raced each other out the door when it was over. Afterwards, before the service began I lingered during the coffee break to see what the other gals were saying. No one was talking about Millie Budge, which was logical because I am her third best friend after Fran and Belle, and if the gals were going to talk about Millie they wouldn't do it in front of me or them.

I caught up with Mildred in church on our regular pew, and we listened to the young boy preacher who sometimes fills in for our regular guy when he's away preaching a missions conference. The boy preached the gospel today as if no one had ever heard it before, and there was a wall between him and the audience and I wondered what that wall was made of, because he wasn't saying anything I didn't believe. Still it was hard to connect with him.

Then the very young man led us in a corporate confession of sin which we all said together, and I listened to Mildred who was sitting beside me, and she got through it just fine – didn't even stumble a bit, which surprised me.

Later in her car, when we were making a completely unnecessary left-hand turn because it is entirely possible to get to Sunday lunch at our Country Club by just making one right-handed turn after another, I asked her point blank: "What got into you this morning, Mildred?"

Budge acted like she didn't know what I was talking about, so I reminded her that she had prayed we would tell the truth to each other, and so I just had to ask her, "Why would you choose Sunday school to sow a wild oat?"

She cocked her head and replied thoughtfully, "I thought I was sowing seeds of righteousness."

"It looked like a wild oat to me," I replied truthfully, because she's the one who prayed that we would tell her the truth.

And then Mildred Budge looked at me oddly as if we hadn't known each other thirty years, and said, "Sometimes it is hard to tell, isn't it?"

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Thoughts about the new 'old age'

We have come to fear frailty more than death.... Frailty coupled with abandonment has become our most dire existential dread.

Wendy Lustbader, Counting on Kindness: The Dilemmas of Dependency

Most of us wish to be self-sufficient throughout our lives.

Some of us manage to pull it off because we are blessed with good health.

Most of us agree with Wendy Lustbader's painful words – we all intuitively dread the day when "we find ourselves lined up in a hallway in a row of wheelchairs waiting to be loaded into an elevator, then transported to a dining room and positioned into a row of waiting mouths…as we overhear one staff member say to another, 'I've got to cut this one's meat and then I'll feed that one.' At this point, we will have become an object rather than a subject."

This is the dilemma of the new 'old age.' All of my grandparents died before the age of 70. Now people live well into the 80's and 90's. Even Margaret Atwood was at a loss when she penned the poem: My mother dwindles and dwindles and lives and lives…Everyone says This can't go on, but it does…I promised to see this through, Whatever that may mean. What can I possibly tell her? I'm here. I'm here. Atwood's mother died at the age of 97.

Author, Lillian B. Rubin, in "60 on Up: The Truth about Aging in America," believes our Western culture abhors old age. She makes no bones about how the up and coming aging generation is seen as 'the monster at the door' or the 'elephant in the room.' Aging in the 21st century, she warns, will last a long time and it will last even longer by the time we get there. The dilemma of this new old age is that life's journey continues despite our society having little use for its aging citizens. Perhaps it was easier when "old" meant sixty-five but when eighty-five and over becomes the norm, "old" becomes more complicated.

For years I have been joking about how I will have time to sit, sit and sit, when I am old and feeble. Only now I am becoming aware of how when confined by illness, old age can be a dessert of time – hours, days, weeks, years perhaps – with little to do except to face everything one has had, been, and done…' An old gentleman who had been athletic all his life one day confessed "…day after day, I have nothing to do…. I sit here, look out the window. It is especially bad on rainy days." It is hard to believe that free time, something we yearn for in our busy middle adult years, becomes a trial to endure. Another previously active man admits he now makes 'too much' of receiving the mail. He says 'waiting' for the mail and 'waiting' for meals, now takes up the better part of his day.

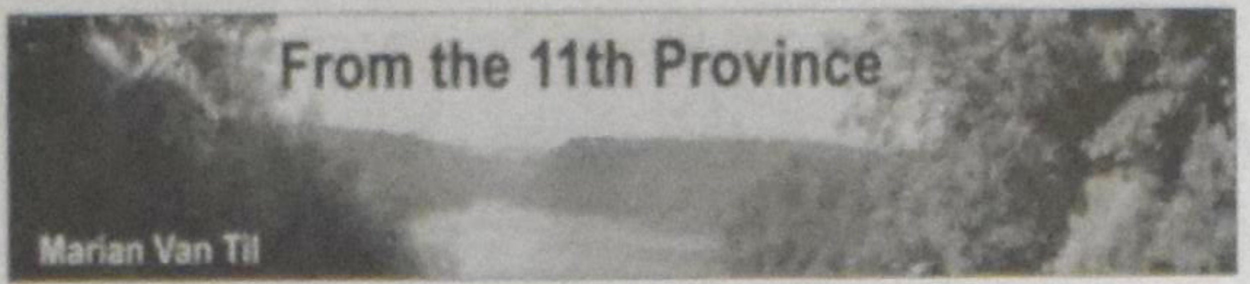
Aging also forces us to become dependent upon the mercy of others – an uncomfortable position to be in when we spent decades running our own lives. One of my siblings recently delivered 'meals on wheels' to a local independent retirement home and was deeply troubled by what she saw. Most of the seniors she met that day were incapable of looking after themselves, yet they were on their own.

Wendy Lustbaker reminds us that helping is not always easy. Sometimes we have to go to extremes of doing too much or too little for someone before we can find the 'right extent' of helping. She also reminds us that 'help' sometimes needs to be based on some sense of exchange. Giving help endlessly can embitter us, unless we are compensated by some appreciation. On the other hand, always receiving help can degrade us, unless we are convinced our helpers are getting something in return. Such was the case with my mother and I. When she became a widow twenty years ago I suggested we walk every Friday. Both of us knew the enjoyment throughout all these years was mutual.

From my perspective the later years of life has a lot to do with valuing "being" over "having" or "doing." In this vein I asked my mother the other day how her mother (who was ill with tuberculosis in the 1930's when she was in her mid fifties, and designated to her bed for several years) managed to accept her lot in life. My mother smiled and said it was her mother's faith. She accepted what came her way and felt God was with her in her struggles. Over time her mother was considered cured from tuberculosis. After a few months of being well, however, she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. She again took to her bed and died in her home a few months later at the age of 57. She left behind her husband (my grandfather), four young adult daughters (the youngest being my mother) and two young sons. I would have liked to have known her.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Reflections



'We tremble not, unmoved we stand'

My Catholic neighbor has told me more than once that she can hardly bear to watch the news anymore, or even read the paper. She reads the headlines and any stories about what the media says is going on in her Roman Catholic Church (mostly bad) and feels sorrow. But most things that the TV cable news networks consider news she'd rather avoid. A great deal of it is simply too disturbing. So much of it so blatantly reveals that fewer and fewer people are acknowledging that God has anything to do with their lives, if he indeed exists.

I greatly sympathize with my neighbor's viewpoint. In fact, much of what I see and read about what's going on in the world causes me stress. Truly – to the point that lately it has started to take over the peace that I have and feel (or should be feeling) in Christ. That's serious, not the least reason being that my chronic medical problems (I'll spare you the details) respond quite negatively to stress.

So why don't I just stop watching all that stuff? Often I do. I'm ever more selective. But I don't think that it's wise or good for Christians to be too ostrich-like about avoiding the news and news-talk, if for no other reason than it allows the opportunity to learn about and then pray about, and for, situations, events and people that come into the news. The need for such prayer is vital. Yet I frequently find it difficult to pray such prayers. (I'll get back to that later.)

Atheist vs. Christian

The night before I wrote this column my husband called my attention to one of those shall-we-watch/shall-we-not? programs (he feels much as I do about these things). We watched. What we saw was most of a debate between a prominent Christian, Dinesh D'Souza, and a well-known atheist, Christopher Hitchens, held on October 22 at The King's College, a Christian university in the heart of New York City.

Hitchens, 58, is a British-American journalist, literary critic and Marxist-turned-conservative political pundit. And he's a vociferous atheist. His latest book is *God is Not Great*. Obviously a particular stab at Islam, but he reviles all religion and scorns anyone "stupid" enough to accept anything on faith (as if *he* doesn't). He believes, in fact, that "religious" parents wouldn't be allowed to inculcate faith in their children, as the kids will just have to be "de-programmed" (his word) using Reason when they get to the public school. (Hitchens, not incidentally, calls Calvin "a sadist and torturer and killer," and the Bible has "a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre." You get the idea.

D'Souza, 46, is a Roman Catholic and native of India who became a U.S. citizen. He was a policy analyst in the Reagan White House and called by the *New York Times Magazine* one of America's most influential conservative thinker. His current book is *What's So Great About Christianity?* That ambiguous title is obviously designed to get people to pick up the book, which turns out to be an elegantly written, spirited but careful defense of Christianity.

These guys had to debate each other sooner or later. I won't go into the debate itself except to say that D'Souza's arguments were cogent and Hitchens' decidedly were not.

Anger resides in the lap of fools

What forcefully struck me was Hitchens' demeanor, and it contrasted sharply with D'Souza's. Hitchens was arrogant, dismissive and *angry*. He is one of a spate of aggressive and angry atheists writing books about the stupidity of religion. Angry atheists seem to have a vital interest in making Christians, particularly, appear stupid, primitive and narrow-minded. God-deniers are of course in a war against God himself, with Satan on their side. No wonder the fruit of the Spirit is twisted. The Spirit himself is absent. Such people are perplexed and frustrated – then angry that "irrational religion" has not disappeared as they were convinced it would once the world began to be governed by rational science. Religion and especially Christianity was supposed to have just faded away by now.

Secondly, many confessed atheists (I use "confessed" advisedly) grew up in households where they were exposed to Christianity (sometimes, admittedly, not in its best forms). In reacting against their upbringing and moving to atheism they have not resolved the anger that welled up along with their rebellion. Just who's "irrational" here?

The week before I watched that debate I saw part of a program on public television in which an elderly man (also British, but I didn't find out who he was) was speaking directly and intimately to the camera about how his inevitable death does not alarm him. The reason? Not Christian hope, but because he will simply meet nothingness (he thinks). What's frightening about ceasing to exist? He, like Hitchens and so many God-deniers, has himself convinced that life is strictly material; it boils down to physical matter.

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise'

Having daily communion with God through his Word and through prayer, and seeing evidence of God everywhere in his creation, and finding purpose, meaning and joy in him, we Christians find it immensely difficult to fathom that learned men can be so blind. The wisdom of God is foolishness to the world, Paul says. Still, I just don't get it. It seems like you have to go out of your way to miss seeing God, to miss the abundant signs that he has created us to long for him and find our rest in him.

As a child of the Reformation, this also makes me think about election, that often contentious doctrine. Are Hitchens and my unidentified materialist among those God "hates" like he hated Esau (while still responsible for their denial of him)? Have they hardened their hearts too long, so God has given them over to what they want?

Only God knows what he has in mind for them. So we should pray for them and the others like them. But I find that hard. Hitchens' chilling and arrogant denial of God reveals that he has overtly chosen to be an enemy of God. (By their fruits you will know them works both ways.) That makes me think of him as an enemy. But *that*, in turn, makes me think that when Jesus said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you," (Matt. 5:44) he meant not just our personal or political or national enemies, but *his* enemies – God's enemies, who become ours by virtue of us being God's children. The Psalmists called for calamitous judgement on their enemies – *God's* enemies. Is it still legitimate, sometimes, to ask God to judge people who arrogantly oppose him? I'm not sure. But Jesus says, "Pray for them." He wouldn't say that if there were no possibility some will yet turn to him. Prayer is a mighty weapon.

Built on a Rock, the church shall stand

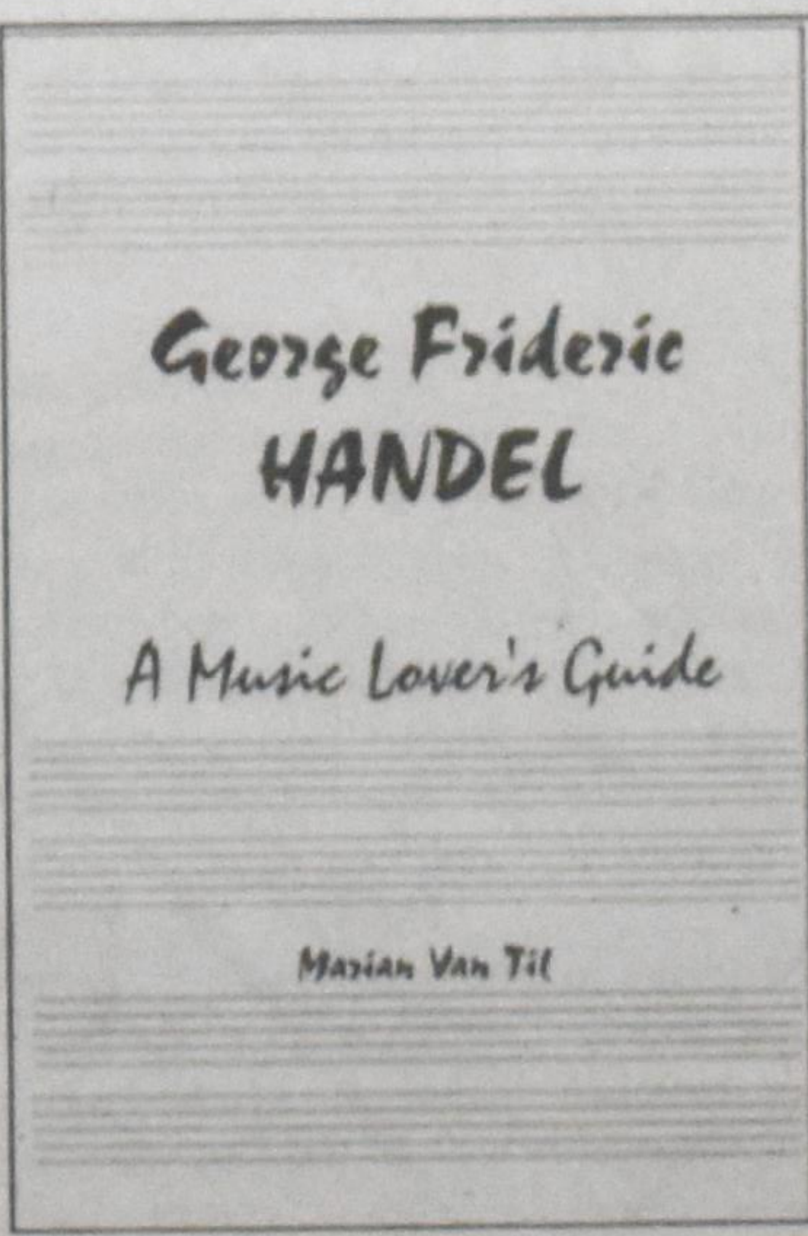
I'm thinking of all this on the eve of Reformation Sunday after experiencing an exhilarating service this morning that re-reminded us of God's sovereign and loving control (often despite appearances, of his preservation of his Word and his church and his gracious gift of salvation. The four hymns we sang, two by Luther himself, wonderfully embodied these truths and more. And for me, those musical-poetic-biblical expressions were like a salve that removed my stress over Satan's ways in the world, reassured me of Christ's triumph and restored his peace that had seemed to evaporate.

Though hordes of devils fill the land all threat'ning to devour us,
We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot over pow'r us.
Let this world's tyrant rage; In battle we'll engage!
His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him.

God's Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it;
For God himself fights by our side With weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house, Gods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day.
The Kingdom's our forever.

Stanzas 3-4: "*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*" (Martin Luther), version from the Lutheran Book of Worship,#228.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com*



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Business directory

Redeemer University College: Balancing tensions during times of change

Martin Mudde

Much effort is going into the development and implementation of Redeemer's strategic plan. It is to position us to effectively address the challenges of the future and we are excited to be part of this process. As part of the process we look over the past 30 years and see an amazing story, which demonstrates time and time again God's faithfulness to a community committed to Bible based education. The school has repeatedly had to respond to changes in its membership, student expectations, and regulatory requirements, involving ongoing balancing of tensions between traditional and newer approaches. I would like to share with you some of these changes and how they impact Redeemer's organization and program.

Program

There have been times that the focus of our program was primarily aimed at academic students. The reasons for this were that this met the needs of most in the community and with the financial resources available and the size of our school we were not able to offer education services for students that were more technically inclined or needed specialized assistance. Over the years in both public and independent schools there has been more emphasis on meeting the needs of individual students. Redeemer, like many other schools has increased its program capability in this area. The advantage of this is that Redeemer can now serve the needs of a wider variety of students. The disadvantage is that this increases the cost of delivering the program.

We are pleased that one area that has remained constant is the quality, Christ-centered education provided by Redeemer. The view that "all the world belongs to God and needs to be redeemed is his name" is the underlying theme on which all courses are based.

Governance

When Redeemer was founded over 30 years ago, Boards were made up of volunteers who were actively involved in functions related to: managing finances, property management, promotion, program development and classroom evaluation. Volunteer staff often did school cleaning. Over the years Principals have become better trained in administration, regulatory requirements have become more onerous, parents demand higher quality professional services and Board members like most other parents have less time to devote to Board activities. As a result there has been a slow transfer of duties from the Board to paid staff.

Examples of this are staff now doing more of the promotion and this year taking on responsibility for accounts receivable and timely submission of pledge forms. The advantages of this are more consistent and timely provision of these services. Boards by focusing more on policy and strategic issues can make better quality decisions. The disadvantages are higher operating costs and potentially less buy-in by parents.

Fee structure

Perhaps the most noticeable area of change of the past 30 years is how our school is funded. The school was founded by a group of parents who clearly felt that Christian day school education should be available to all Christian parents who desired this for their children. This group of parents also felt that providing Christian education was not simply the responsibility of the biological parents but in fact was a communal responsibility. Much emphasis was placed on Bible teachings that stressed the responsibility that Christian have to serve the Lord together and to "build each other up in faith". In this aspect we were a more homogeneous community than we are today.

As a result many members of this community considered their support a lifetime commitment, not just for the duration that their children were enrolled. Up to 50 percent of the revenue came from donations and fundraisers. Although the absolute amount of funds raised this way has remained constant, the proportion has declined to approximately 10 percent. In the 70's no student was refused enrolment simply because they could not afford it. Today we still benefit greatly from our founding members and we still have an aggressive fee structure to accommodate those with lower incomes. The big question is whether and how we can maintain it. There is continual pressure to have a fee structure that more closely reflects the cost of the service and there has been a slow trend to transfer some responsibility of supporting lower income families to the church where they worship. In response some congregations have become more active in supporting their lower income families and another is considering a bursary program.

Please give thanks to our Lord for his ongoing blessings and pray for wisdom for those who lead us through these changes.

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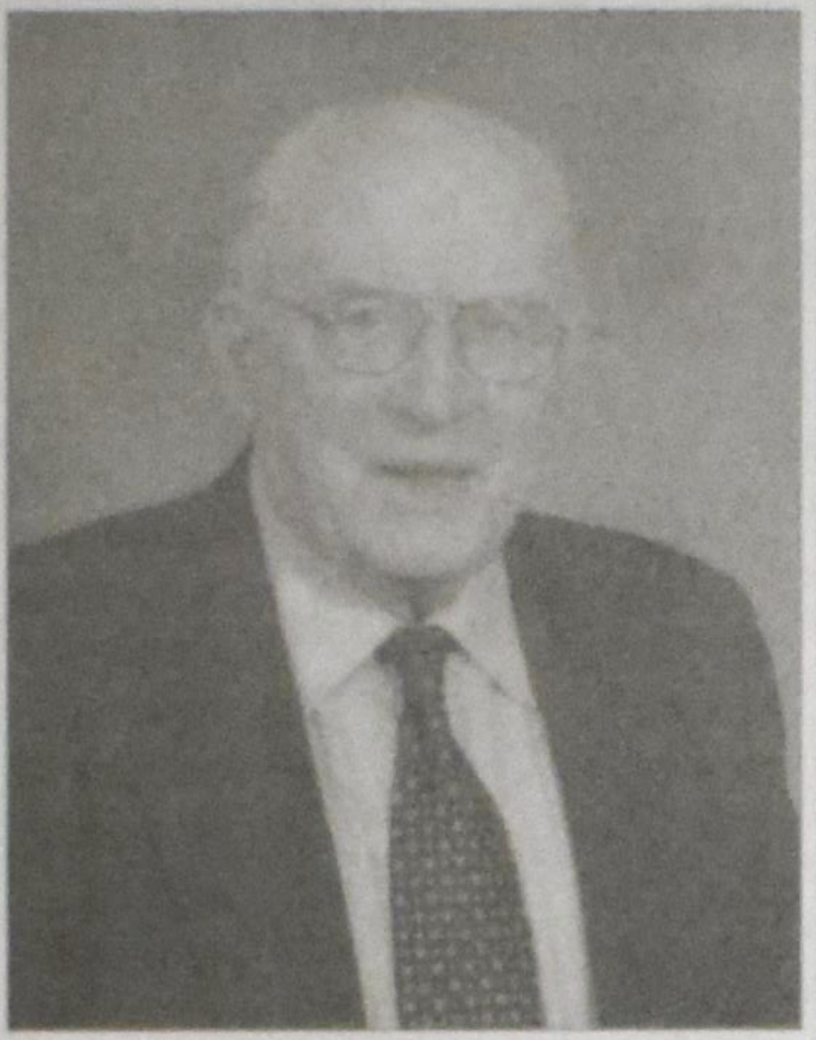
Classifieds

Birthdays



Happy 90th Birthday

Gerrit Boschman

Gerrit Boschman, and family, would like you to join us in celebrating the 90 years of life, goodness and blessings the Lord has bestowed upon him.

You are welcome to join us for an **Open House** on Saturday, November 10, 2007 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Wellingstone Christian Home (phase 2), 261 Stonechurch Road East, Hamilton, Ontario

Love and best wishes from your children: Gina & Sid VanderWal, Bert & Aafke Boschman, Steffie & Bill Schilthuis, Jenny & Pete Kok, Ada & George Kloet, Jeannette & John Couperus, Muxie & Pete Tonellato, Kathy & Mike Goertz. Opa to 26 grandchildren, and Great-opa to 27 great-grandchildren.

Correspondence may be sent to:
Gerrit Boschman
Wellingstone Christian Home
Apt 116-1415 Upper Wellington Street E
Hamilton ON L9A 5E8

On November 9, 2007

Fred Slotman

the Lord willing, will celebrate his **80th birthday**

An **Open House** will be held on Saturday, November 10, 2007 from 2-4 pm in the Smithville Christian Reformed Church 6522 Smithville Road, Smithville, Ont.

Spouse – Margaret SLotman-Jansen
Children:
Hennie & Gerrit †
Rhea & Bill
Betty & Albert
Bernice & Tim
Grandchildren & great-grandchildren

Correspondence: Fred Slotman
Box 794-169 West St, Smithville ON L0R 2A0

Anniversaries

God has richly blessed our parents and grandparents,

Gerrit and Iefke Heersink

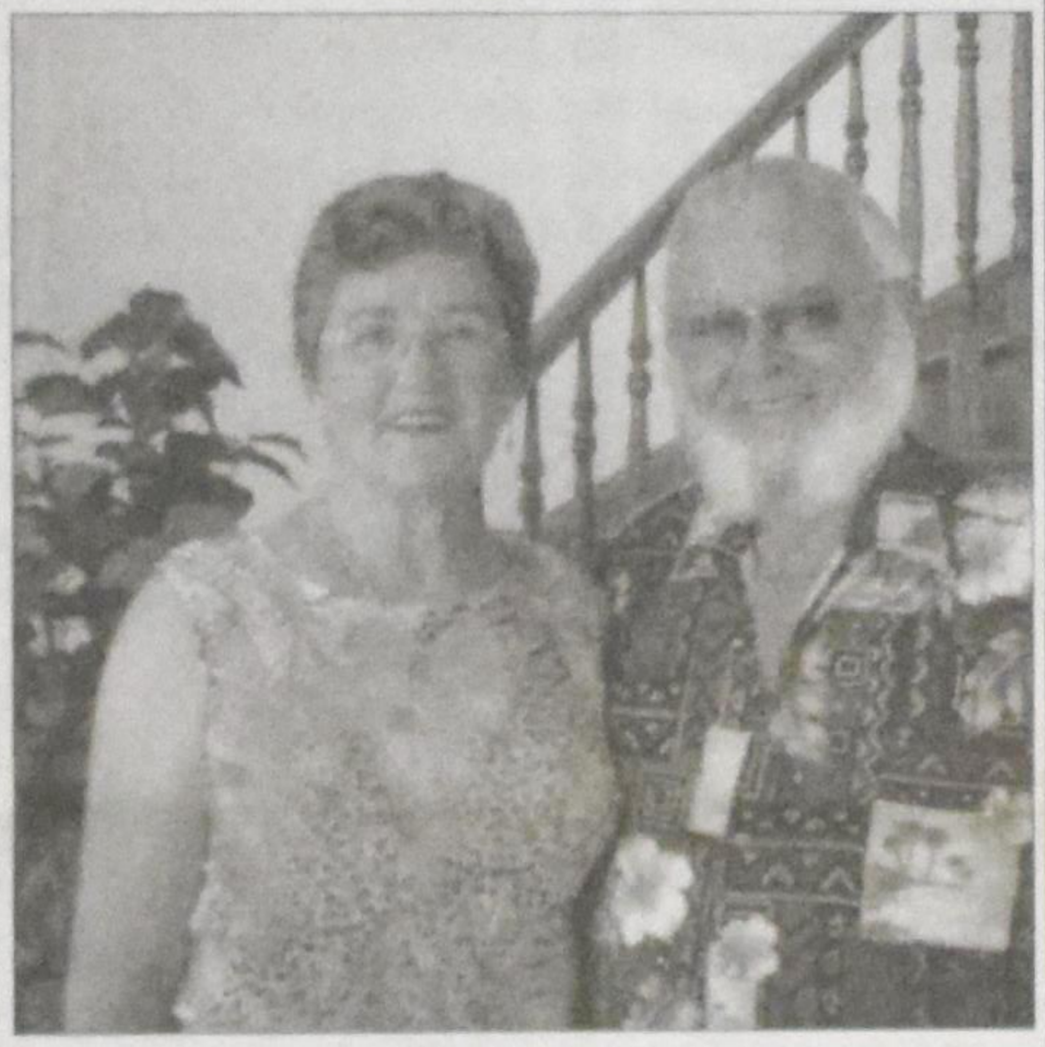
in their **50 years of marriage**.

Come and celebrate this anniversary with us by attending an **Open House** in their honour, to be held on Saturday, **November 10** between 2 and 4 p.m. Our father has also been a faithful minister in the Christian Reformed Church for 50 years.

A **Service of Celebration** marking this anniversary will be held on Sunday, **November 11** at 10 a.m. Both events are to be held at Cephas CRC, 220 Goodfellow Road, Peterborough, ON.

Their children: Roland (Elizabeth), John, and Paul (Laura), their grandchildren: Joel (Claudia), Brittney (Ron), Bianca, Brianna, Maxwell, Samuel and Margaret and their great-grandchild Eric.

Address: 105-650 Parkhill Rd W
Peterborough ON K9J 6N6



1957 November 16 2007
St. Catharines, ON Ancaster, ON

Congratulations to our parents & grandparents

Jake and Teresa Rumph (Van Minnen)

on their **50th Wedding Anniversary.**
We thank them for their love and support.
We pray that God will bless them and us with many more years together.

Debbie & Harold Knor, *Ancaster*
Brian & Leah Knor, Samuel & Ava
Karen & Fred Macey, Jasmine
Amy Knor & Greg Sommer (fiancée)
Wendy & Tim Boers
David & Nancy Rumph, *Ancaster*
Jessica
Jeremy
Edward Rumph & Sharron Ingram, *Cookstown*
Cynthia & John Veldhoen, *Belleville*

An **Open House** to celebrate this joyous occasion will be held on Saturday, November 17, 2007 from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. at their residence 42 Milne Court, Ancaster ON L9G 4T3

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:105

1957 November 15 2007

With thankfulness to God, we announce with great joy the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents

George and Gerda Van Dyk
(nee **Brus**)

With much love from your children:
Bill & Nancy Van Dyk, *Newmarket*
John Van Dyk, *Pickering*
Jim & Jennifer Van Dyk, *Pickering*
Joanne & Derrick Lycklama, *Newmarket*
Ingrid Van Dyk, *Pickering*

and your 7 grandchildren:
Stephanie, Katelyn, Evan, Renée, Colin, Kurt and Camille

To celebrate this blessed occasion friends and family are invited to an **Open House** on Saturday November 17, 2007 from 2-4 p.m. Horizon Hall, Peace Tower Holland Christian Homes 45 Kingnoll Dr. Brampton

Home address: Peace Tower 1101
45 Kingknoll Dr.
Brampton ON L3Y 5P2

Obituaries

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7,8

Reverend Alvin H. Venema

went to be with his Lord and Saviour on October 01, 2007 in his 81st year.

Beloved husband of Norma (Kalmink) Venema

Loving father of:
David and Shelley Venema (Manhattan, Montana)
Mary and Harry DeVries (Caledonia, Ontario)
Robert Venema (Manhattan, Montana)
Carolyn and Robert Kippers (Caledonia, Ontario)

Also loved by 13 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

Alvin faithfully served various Christian Reformed congregations throughout Canada and the United States during the 55 years of his ordination.

A celebration of thanksgiving for his life took place at the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church on October 04, 2007.

Correspondence address: Norma Venema, 1812 Sawmill Road, Caledonia ON N3W 2G9

Katwijk aan Zee, The Netherlands
February 14, 1913

Brampton, ON
October 11, 2007

Geertruida (Gertrude) Kamphuis (nee **Parlevliet**)

passed into the Presence of her Heavenly Father very peacefully after almost 15 years of perseverance and patient hope in communicating without speech. She was an amazing example to all of us of the Lord's strength in our weakness and his faithfulness in difficult circumstances.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. II Timothy 4:7,8

Predeceased by her husband of 59 years, George (Gerke) Kamphuis (2001), daughter Jane (1960) and son John (1997), as well as 4 sisters and 2 brothers in the Netherlands

Mother, Grandmother, and Great-grandmother of:
○Donna Kamphuis, *St. Catharines*
•Bill
•John & Susanna, *Hammond, IN, USA*
•Peter, Rachel
•Lisa & Dan Allen, *Elmira*
•Will, Sarah, Brett
○Anna & Conrad Van Dijk, *Ancaster*
•Tracy, *Ancaster*
•Tim, *Calgary*
•Supriya & Jeremi Paradis, *Woodstock*
•Helena, Noah
•Sashi (Trish), *Cambridge*
•Kerrie, Timothy
•Shanti, *Kuwait*
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Nov 2-4 Marriage encounter weekend in **Kingston**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

Nov 10 Institute for Christian Studies 40th Anniversary dinner & silent Auction, Toronto. Information and registration at: www.icscanada.edu/events

Nov 15 Business Open House at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. Discover why business is partnering with Redeemer University College at the Annual Business Community Open House, from 4:30pm to 6:30pm. For more information, please contact Janet McKenzie at 905-648-2139 x 4493, or jmckenzie@redeemer.ca.

Nov 21-Nov 24 Theatre: "Home in Alfalfa" at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster.** Redeemer University College presents the comedy adapted by Raymond Louter, based on the book by Hugh Cook, and directed by Tom Carson. Tickets for the matinee on Wednesday are $7. Tickets for the evening performances are $13, students and seniors $11. Please contact Box Office at 905-648-2139 x 4211.

Nov 23 Annual Dutch Christmas Hymn Sing at Holland Christian Homes, **Brampton**. See ad this issue for details.

Dec 7 Christmas Concert at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. A celebration of festive anthems and carols, featuring the Redeemer University College Concert Choir and Sinfonia. Tickets $17 or $15 for students and seniors. Please contact Box Office at 905-648-2139 x 4211

Jan 27/08 Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. A special service to be held at 10 a.m. More events will be held in April.

Feb 15-17 Marriage encounter weekend in **Niagara Falls**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

April 19, 20 Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. Celebrations and special events will be held on Saturday April 19 at 7 p.m. and Sunday April 20 during the 10 a.m. service.

May 2-4 Marriage encounter weekend in **London**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

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News

Poland's vote: more nationalism or closer ties to Europe?

Robert Marquand

WARSAW – Moderate pro-Europe leader Donald Tusk may have defeated the ardently nationalist Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski in a Polish election that crystallized two very different visions of this country and its future. The decisive Sunday victory for Tusk's Civic Platform in a record-turnout election seen weeks ago as a shoo-in for Kaczynski – is widely attributed to Tusk's own rising toughness and maturity as a politician. With 91 percent of the vote counted, Tusk's 41.6 percent of the votes to Kaczynski's 32 percent comes close to a popular mandate.

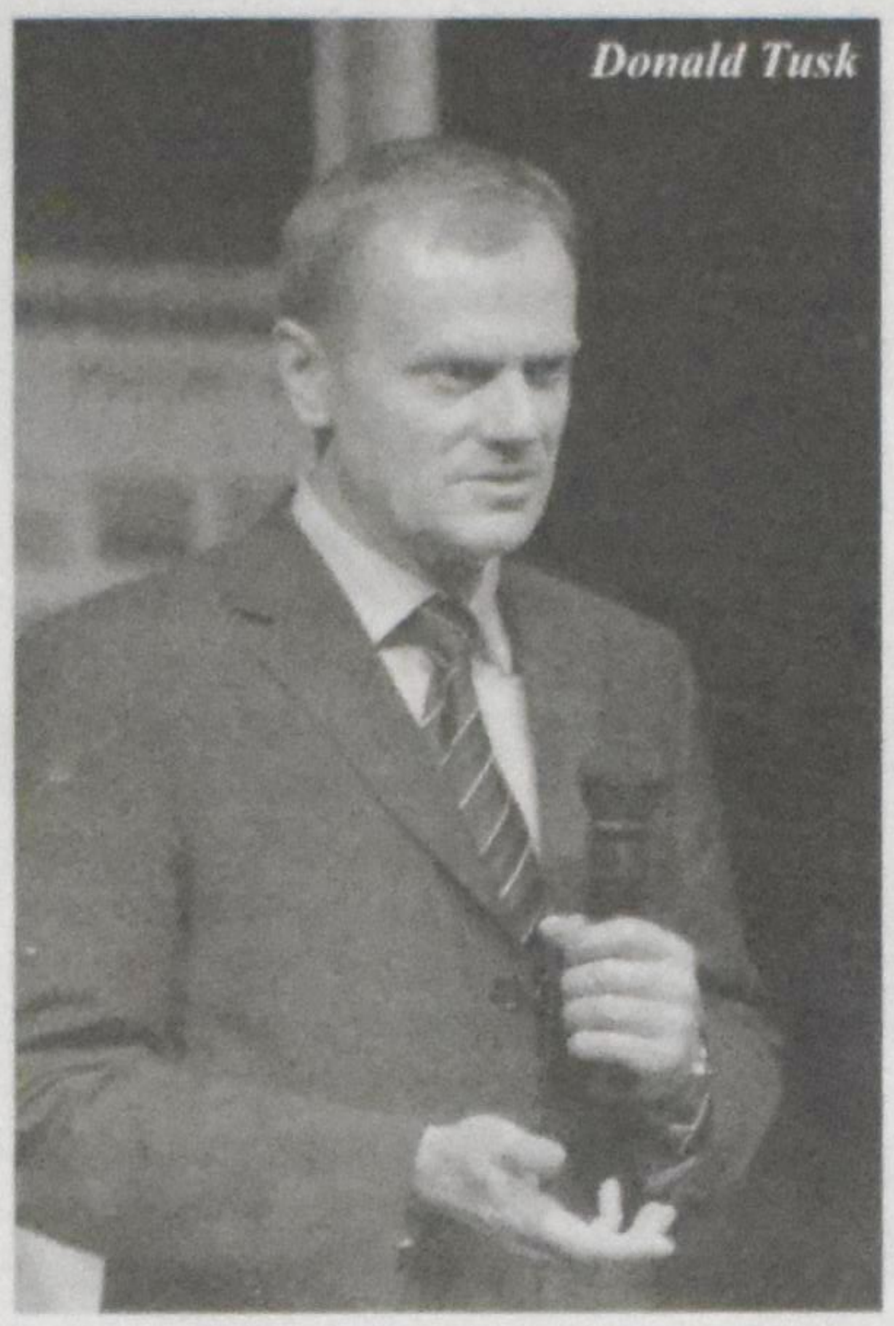
For the leading opposition party, Poland's election on Oct. 21 was the most important event since 1989, when Poland extracted itself from the Soviet Union while 250,000 troops were still in the country. They termed it a historic battle between light and dark.

For center-right Civic Platform candidate Donald Tusk, the vote decided whether Poland turns inward, chauvinist, and authoritarian under Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski – or flowers into a more open economy and civil society, as well as a closer partner to Europe. The party also favors pulling Polish troops out of Iraq.

For Poland's ruling conservative Kaczynski brothers, who are president and prime minister, the election was a battle between light and dark, but for other reasons. For them, it was about establishing for the first time since the 18th century a genuine, "pure" Poland – a lighthouse of Catholic moral and Polish national virtues, a place where the forgotten poor have hope, and where the security services, rightly directed, will finally purge white collar crooks, communist collaborators, and ex-dissidents. Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the twins, as they are known here, want a Poland that stands for Poland in Europe, a friend of Washington, and isn't rolled over by Germany or Russia.

Until a week before the election, most polls showed the Kaczynskis would take it. But an Oct. 12 televised debate put Mr. Tusk in a neck and neck race. European leaders, wondering about the direction of a new EU state often described as prickly or unpredictable, were very interested in the outcome.

The snap elections were called in August amid a terrific fracturing of political coalitions here. The atmosphere in Warsaw was charged by a full-bore campaign by the Kaczynskis to dismiss high-ranking officials and even to imply that former dissidents like Solidarity leaders Lech Walesa, Bronislaw Geremek, and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and even Polish war hero Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a former foreign minister, are insufficiently patriotic.



Donald Tusk

Since taking office in 2005, the Kaczynski twins have fired or dismissed no fewer than 14 cabinet-level officials, including the ministers of finance, interior, defense, and foreign affairs. Defense minister Radek Sikorski, a prominent political figure here, resigned in February.

To be sure, experts admit that from the late 1990s to 2005, corruption in Poland was a serious problem. Yet, the twins attempt to clean up Poland has been at least equally divisive. The combination of broad "lustration" laws this spring – that used old secret service files to ferret out collaborators (the effort was struck down by a constitutional court) – as well as the formation of an active secret bureau of investigation into corruption (beholden to the prime minister, according to Western diplomats) has created fear of retribution along political lines.

"The brothers used the anticorruption and the decommunization campaigns as two mutually reinforcing ways to vet anyone who wants to participate in public," says Jacques Rupnik of Sciences Po in Paris. "It has created a lot of hatred in Poland."

But the Law and Justice Party (PiS) of the twins appeals to ordinary people in the countryside, to older Poles who have not enjoyed the fruits of Poland's postcommunist economic success, and to staunch Catholics. "Kaczynski is not corrupt, and it is time to end our habit of business in politics," says Tomasz, a Warsaw taxi driver.

The Catholic voting bloc is potent. This is due, in no small part, to the media phenomenon of Radio Maryja. The radio outlet, which also includes a TV channel and several new schools, is an ultraconservative Catholic operation that analysts say can deliver some 2 million voters. Nearly all the leading political candidates have been on Radio Maryja.

But when Tusk, leader of the Civic Alliance (PO) Party said he wanted to take part in a Radio Maryja air discussion last week, a Law and Justice Party member of parliament, Jolanta Szczypinska, said: "In order to be invited by this radio station, [Tusk] would have to go to confession first."

Parties like the Civic Platform and the Left and Democrats (LiD), made up of an unusual blend of ex-communists and dissidents, score better in the cities and among what one Western diplomat called "the moving Poland" – younger, Internet-savvy Poles who identify themselves as modern and cosmopolitan.

Until the week before the election, most polls showed that Law and Justice would dominate Sunday's vote.

Yet the Oct. 12 TV debate between Tusk and Jaroslav Kaczynski seemed to have shaken the polls. Known as a "nice guy," Tusk, who has lost a number of Polish elections, took a combative approach with the fastidious Kaczynski – knocking his record, pointing out that Poland has built less than a mile of new roads in the past year, has not delivered on the leftist agenda of housing for the poor, and has harmed Poland's image in Europe.

A Civic Platform win suits financial markets in Europe, expecting lower taxes and faster moves towards adopting the euro to replace the Polish zloty.

In recent elections, many Poles have been tuning out a political process they see as tainted or obtuse and have not turned out to vote. In the cities, the Kaczynskis are criticized as parochial or moralizing. The opposition is called hapless or message-less. While European states score 70 to 80 percent turnouts, Poland's recent election was closer to 40. A whopping 2 million of some 20 million Poles of voting age have "voted with their feet" since 2004, experts note, leaving for jobs in Europe, especially in London. Most are young.

In this election about 55 percent of voters turned out to cast a ballot, the highest turnout since the first flush of democracy after the collapse of communist rule. The high turnout rate is important not least because the Law and Justice strategy has been to rule as a strong minority party heading a coalition of smaller parties. If only 40 percent of voters turn out, then the Kaczynskis only needed 40 percent of that turnout to win.

Analysts say the election is a rejection by middle-class and younger voters of the contentious politics exercised by the Law and Justice party headed by Jaroslaw – including anticommunist and anticorruption campaigns.

Robert Marquand is staff writer with The Christian Science Monitor.

News Digest

The power of laughter?

My home nurse still believes in it. The first thing she asks is about my frame of mind. When I tell her I'm feeling positive, she says, "Good – that's half the battle." At the cancer center, questionnaires also ask about your sense of well-being and your level of anxiety. A recent study conducted over a period of time with cancer patients, however, suggests that it doesn't make any difference whether you're a positive thinker or a pessimist, upbeat or cranky. Your tumors will not shrink just because you have a be-happy-attitude.

Of course, to be grateful for every bit of help and every day of life might be good in and of itself. And even if being upbeat won't cure you, it will make you easier to live with. Your spouse might appreciate that.

Years ago the editor of *The Atlantic* magazine claimed he had cured himself of cancer by watching Abbot and Costello movies. Laughter, he argued, has healing properties. I'm not sure what my wife would do if I sat around all day geefling and guffawing at Abbot and Costello movies. It might not be good for my health.

Growing girth – the blame game

Childhood obesity is becoming an increasingly hot-button issue. In Britain, if your child becomes overweight, the school might inform you that you have received a failing grade as a parent. A speaker at a cardiovascular conference in Canada, however, blamed much of the obesity on the inactivity of kids while in school. Teachers, not parents, are to blame.

I find it strange, for when I compare the level of activity in present-day schools to that 40 or 50 years ago, I'm convinced that there was more inactivity in those days than now. We sat quietly in rows and were not permitted to move around. Nowadays kids are constantly in motion.

The entire matter is becoming so politicized in some quarters that your parental competence may be challenged if you feed your kids french fries and pizza. It seems only a matter of time when parents will no longer be judged by the behavior of their kids but by their weight.

But if the principal calls you on the carpet because your child is overweight, you can always blame it on the school.

African leadership

Good governance among the strongmen of Africa is so rare a commodity that a rich benefactor has offered a prize of $5 million to the African leader with the best marks in governance. The winner will be judged in terms of how much of the governments resources get to where they're supposed to go – to education, healthcare, fighting poverty and corruption, and building roads.

Of course, if an autocratic leader is motivated first of all by money, he can accumulate considerably more than $ 5 million in a few years just by skimming a percentage off the top – as almost all of them seem to do.

It is hardly a compliment to African leaders that the world seems to think that the way to keep them honest is to bribe them to do what is best for their country.